

HISTORY
WAR

NEW

HITLER AT WAR

EXPLORE THE RISE AND FALL OF
HISTORY'S GREATEST MONSTER



Digital
Edition

FUTURE

FIFTH
EDITION



✠ DEFINING MOMENTS ✠ MAJOR BATTLES ✠ STRATEGIC MISTAKES

HISTORY of WAR

HITLER

AT

WAR

Chronicling the life and crimes of one of history's greatest monsters, **Hitler at War** looks at the Führer's early years, his remarkable rise to power and his attempts to conquer Europe. Discover the ten moments that defined Hitler's life, including his first days in the Nazi Party, the ruthless 'Night of the Long Knives' and his final hours in the Führerbunker. In-depth features offer insight into some of the key battles and military moments of World War II – from the early successes of Hitler's 'blitzkrieg' strategy and his plans to invade Britain to the doomed decision to take on the might of Stalin's Russia and the Third Reich's last stand in Berlin. We also explore Hitler's leadership style and its impact on the war, as well as the strategic mistakes that would ultimately lead to his demise and the downfall of Nazi Germany.

「 FUTURE 」

HITLER AT WAR

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

Editorial

Editor **Dan Peel**

Designer **Steve Dacombe**

Compiled by **Charles Ginger & Briony Duguid**

Senior Art Editor **Andy Downes**

Head of Art & Design **Greg Whitaker**

Editorial Director **Jon White**

Cover images

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Photography

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Advertising

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Commercial Director **Clare Dove**

International

Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**

licensing@futurenet.com

www.futurecontenthub.com

Circulation

Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production

Head of Production **Mark Constance**

Production Project Manager **Matthew Eglinton**

Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**

Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**

Production Managers **Keely Miller, Nola Cokely,**

Vivienne Calvert, Fran Twentyman

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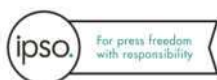
Chief executive **Zillah Byng-Thorne**
Non-executive chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief financial officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

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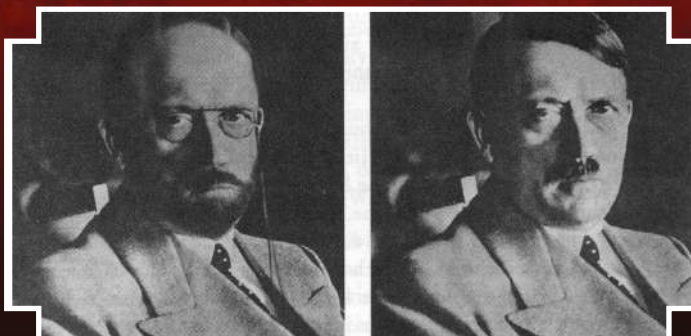
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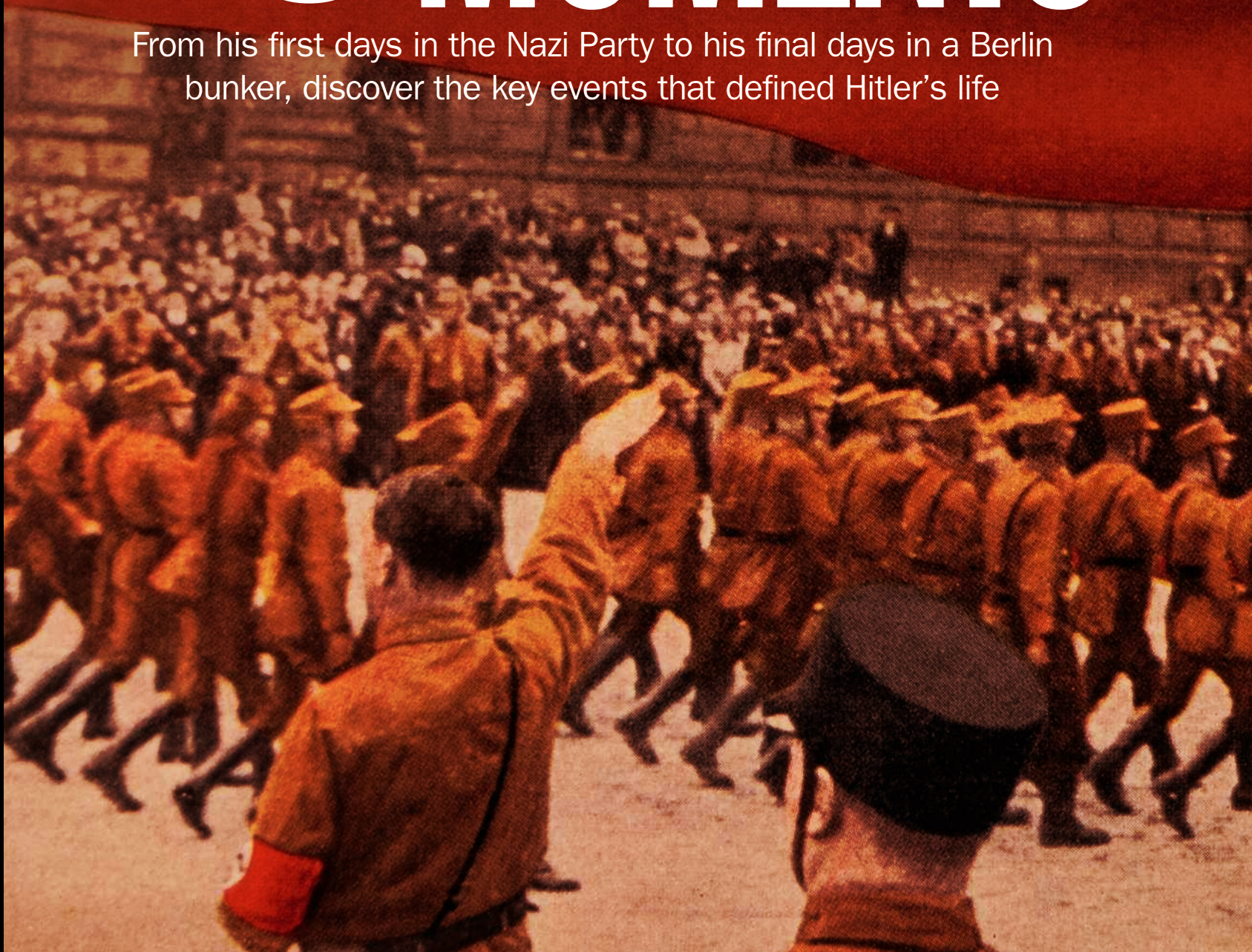
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HITLER'S

10 DEFINING MOMENTS

From his first days in the Nazi Party to his final days in a Berlin bunker, discover the key events that defined Hitler's life



When a third child was born to Alois and Klara Hitler in a small town in Austria-Hungary on 20 April 1889, nobody knew that the baby – named Adolf – would grow up to become history's most infamous villain. Rebellious and strong-willed as a child, he harboured dreams of becoming an artist, but he clashed with his father and did poorly at school. Like many of his generation, he found himself in the trenches of the Western Front and served as a dispatch runner in the German Army. Although Hitler survived the attrition of World

War I, his experience of warfare – and perhaps more importantly, of surrender – would have a lasting impact. The rise and fall of the Führer is well documented and has been studied by countless historians since his death in 1945. However, Hitler's path to power – from revolutionary to politician to dictator – was not predestined. Had some of the key events in Hitler's life turned out a little differently, the history of Germany, Europe and the whole world may have gone down another path.

Some events depended on pure luck. What if a bullet had been aimed slightly to the left during the Beer Hall Putsch? What if a colonel

hadn't nudged a briefcase with his foot in July 1944? There are times during which Hitler's destiny depended on the actions of others, from Neville Chamberlain's willingness to appease Germany and avoid war to Rommel's disobedience and retreat from El Alamein. There are also key moments during which Hitler's twisted ideology was developed, from his first meeting with the fledgling Nazi movement to his order that sent millions to the extermination camps.

Discover ten landmark moments that defined Hitler's life – without them, history may have been very different.

**“HITLER'S POPULARITY
ROCKETED DURING THE GREAT
DEPRESSION WHICH FOLLOWED
THE WALL STREET CRASH”**



HITLER JOINS THE NAZIS

12 SEPTEMBER 1919

HITLER MAKES FIRST CONTACT WITH THE POLITICAL PARTY THAT WOULD HELP FORGE HIS TWISTED IDEOLOGY

While in hospital recovering from a gas attack in the trenches of the Western Front, Lance Corporal Adolf Hitler heard the news that Germany had accepted defeat in the Great War. He saw his country's capitulation as a stab in the back, the result of a conspiracy by shady forces controlling the government, and that it must be atoned for. The only question was how to do it. Retained by the German Army and trained as an intelligence agent, 29-year-old Hitler was sent to infiltrate the German Workers' Party (DAP), a right-wing organisation committed to national recovery. Anton Drexler, leader of the DAP, thought that Germany had been corrupted by Jews, Marxists and capitalists, and Hitler soon fell under Drexler's spell. The future Führer found himself among a

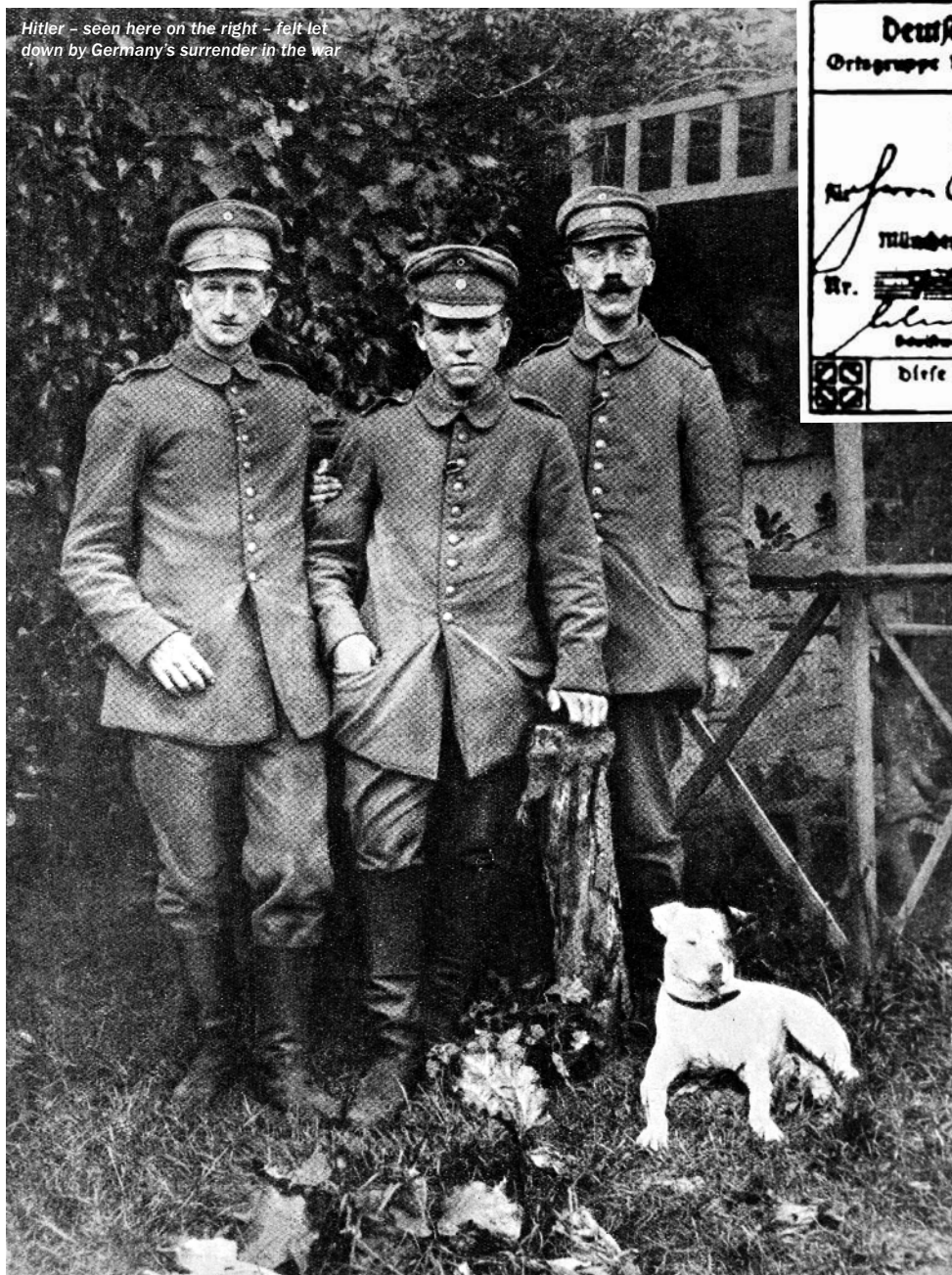
group which promised to avenge the defeat of November 1918 and, rather than reporting on the DAP, Hitler became a signed-up member and was quickly recognised as a superb orator.

Hitler soon rose through the ranks. He designed the banner for the now-renamed National Socialist German Workers' Party – a black swastika on a white circle on a red banner – and became a full-time publicist for the Nazis upon his discharge from the army. After some internal squabbling, he replaced Drexler as chairman in 1921, winning the vote by a margin of 533 to 1.

Within two years he had shifted from an agent of the government to the leader of the party that would smash the government, and much of Europe with it.

“THE FUTURE FÜHRER FOUND HIMSELF AMONG A GROUP WHICH PROMISED TO AVENGE THE DEFEAT OF NOVEMBER 1918 AND, RATHER THAN REPORTING ON THE DAP, HITLER BECAME A SIGNED-UP MEMBER”

Hitler – seen here on the right – felt let down by Germany's surrender in the war



Above: Hitler's membership card of the fledgling DAP, which would later morph into the Nazi Party



Above: Anton Drexler, first leader of the DAP, had more influence than any other on the birth of Hitler's political ideology

BEER HALL PUTSCH 8-9 NOVEMBER 1923

A FAILED REVOLUTION AND NEAR DEATH LEADS TO A SPELL IN PRISON AND A CHANGE IN STRATEGY

Hitler, locked arm-in-arm with Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter, marched towards the line of Bavarian police. Suddenly, shots rang out. Scheubner-Richter dropped to the pavement, fatally wounded by a bullet to the lung, dragging Hitler with him. The Nazi leader suffered a dislocated shoulder in the fall, but history may have been very different had the bullet hit half a metre to the left.

Hitler's near-death experience came as the Beer Hall Putsch came to a bloody close. The previous night, 600 Nazis had stormed into the Bürgerbräukeller beer hall in Munich, where the state commissioner of Bavaria was giving a speech. Hitler jumped on a chair, fired a shot in the air and announced the beginning of a national revolution. The plan was to take control of Munich and march on Berlin, inspired by the March on Rome that had brought Mussolini to power. However, what worked in Italy failed in Germany. Although Hitler had persuaded World War I general Erich Ludendorff to back his cause, he found little support among the Bavarian state government, police and army once he announced his intentions in the beer hall. In an error of judgement, the state commissioner, Gustav Ritter von Kahr, was released and he began to round up army and police to deal

with the revolutionaries. With the revolution stuttering, the putschists decided to march on the Bavarian defence ministry in the vain hope of picking up popular support, only to be fired on by police. Four police officers and 16 Nazis were killed; Hitler was next to one of the victims when he died. Hitler escaped but was arrested two days later and put on trial for high treason. He used the 24-day trial, which was widely covered by the national media, as a showcase. He moderated his ideas during the trial, emphasising his selfless devotion to the German people and dropping any references to Jewish conspiracies. Although found guilty, the sympathetic judge sentenced him to five years in prison without hard labour. Hitler only actually served eight months in Landsberg prison, and was not idle during his confinement. He spent the time writing *Mein Kampf*, outlining his political ideology, and pondered the future direction of the Nazi Party. Upon his release, the Nazis would change strategy and, instead of looking to overthrow the government through a revolution, would seek electoral success to seize control of government from within the system. The failure of the Beer Hall Putsch led Hitler and the Nazis to pursue power through the ballot rather than the bullet.



Above: While in prison, Hitler shifted Nazi strategy and sought election rather than revolution

WALL STREET CRASH 24-29 OCTOBER 1929

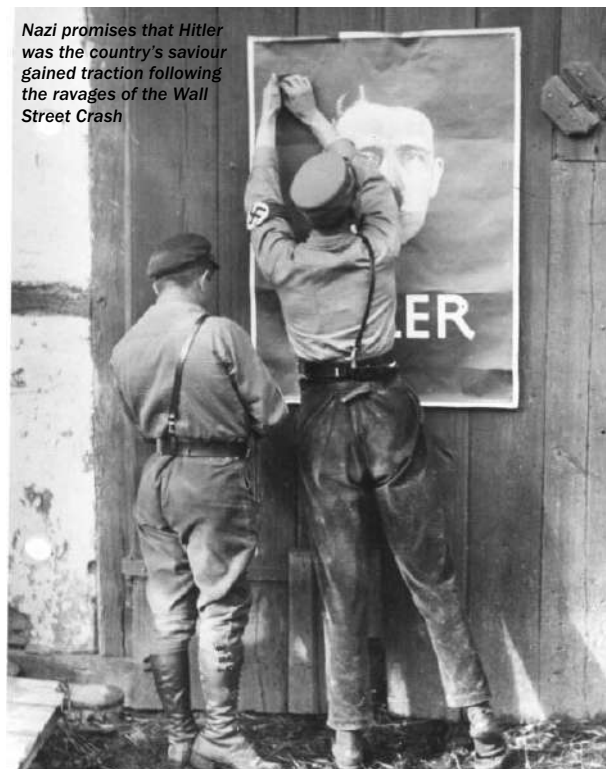
THE EFFECTS OF ECONOMIC DEPRESSION ARE SEIZED UPON BY A RADICAL RIGHT-WINGER WHO PROMISES TO SOLVE GERMANY'S PROBLEMS

On 24 October 1929, stock market speculators in Wall Street began selling their shares after the market opened 11 per cent down. So rapid was the speed of decline that it turned into a tidal wave of panic, with shareholders offloading as quickly as possible to avoid becoming bankrupt. Financial markets went into a tailspin for weeks, helping to plunge the world into the Great Depression. Germany was particularly susceptible to the effects of the Wall Street Crash. The country was dependent on US loans which were swiftly recalled, causing German banks and businesses to go bust. In the midst of the crisis, Germans turned away from the moderate political parties which had brought recovery during the 1920s and looked to radicals for solutions.

It was an opportunity that Hitler was keen to take advantage of. He promised work for the unemployed and prosperity for business. He would make Germany strong again by ending the payment of war reparations, tearing up the hated Treaty of Versailles, crushing communism and ending Jewish-led corruption. Hitler's brand of National Socialism was music to the ears of a despairing nation and election success followed – the Nazis claimed 107 seats in the Reichstag in 1930, up from 12 in 1928. Hitler had finally begun his rise to power.



"Diligent young man looking for job" – the economic depression caused widespread unemployment



Nazi promises that Hitler was the country's saviour gained traction following the ravages of the Wall Street Crash

NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES

30 JUNE - 2 JULY 1934

CHANCELLOR HITLER STABS FORMER ALLIES IN THE BACK IN A RUTHLESS RAID ON HIS POLITICAL OPPONENTS

Nazism, like all political parties, represented a range of ideas, policies and interests, but Hitler wasn't interested in presiding over a conglomerate of radical right-wingers. He wanted sole control of the Nazi Party and stamped his authority in a sudden and vicious strike against his perceived opponents.

Around 6am in the morning on 30 June 1934, troops from the SS broke into the Hanselbauer Hotel and Hitler personally arrested a fellow Nazi, Ernst Röhm. Röhm was given a pistol and left alone in a prison cell for ten minutes but refused to commit suicide, as Hitler had hoped. Instead, two SS soldiers entered the cell and shot him in the chest.

Röhm's rapid fall from power was extraordinary considering that he had previously been one of Hitler's staunchest allies. As leader of the SA, the Nazi paramilitaries, Röhm had played

an instrumental role in the Nazi rise to power. Röhm's brownshirts had protected Hitler at volatile rallies, disrupted the meetings of political opponents and generally acted as a vigilante political army. However, once Hitler was appointed to govern, the thugs in the SA became more of a hindrance than a help. The differences between Hitler and Röhm became more obvious: Hitler thought that Röhm's championing of a socialist revolution sounded suspiciously like communism; Röhm was openly homosexual, contradicting the ideal of the Nazis as clean-living embodiments of pure Aryanism; and Röhm was asking to be given overall command of the German Army. Hitler was aware that Röhm might be seeking more power to lead a coup – he had turned from an ally to a potential rival who had to be despatched.

Yet Röhm was not the only victim of the Night of the Long Knives. Over the next three days, the

SS brutally purged a number of other political opponents of the regime, claiming that they had uncovered a plot to overthrow the government. By the end of three days of violence, 85 people lay dead (although the actual figure may have been as high as 200) and Hitler was the undisputed master of the Nazi Party.



Ernst Röhm was a former confidante of the Nazi leader, but Hitler showed a ruthless lack of loyalty by ordering his murder

VICTIMS OF THE PURGE

THE NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES REACHED THE VERY TOP OF GERMAN POLITICS – NOBODY WAS SAFE FROM HITLER'S PARANOID WRATH



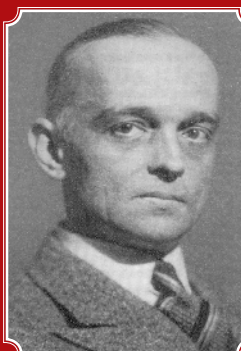
ERNST RÖHM

Röhm joined the Nazi Party in 1919, around the same time as Hitler, and quickly became leader of the fledgling SA. By 1934 he was the commander of 4.5 million SA paramilitaries and potentially a dangerous rival to Hitler.



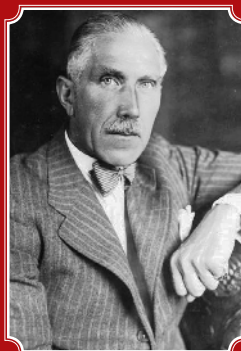
EDMUND HEINES

Röhm's deputy in the SA, Heines was supposedly discovered in bed with an 18-year-old man when the SS raided the Hanselbauer Hotel. Heines and his bedmate were taken outside and shot by the SS; the circumstances of his late night discovery were widely disseminated in the Nazi press.



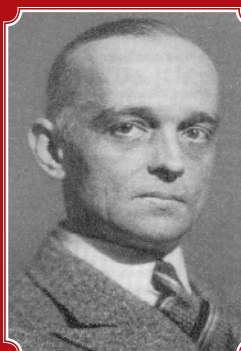
GREGOR STRASSER

Strasser was an able administrator who helped the growth of grassroots Nazism but disagreed with Hitler over the fundamental aims of National Socialism. After his arrest, Strasser was shot in the back and left to bleed to death in a prison cell.



FRANZ VON PAPEN

Even Hitler's vice-chancellor – a non-Nazi appointed by President Hindenburg to curb the excesses of Nazism – was implicated in the Night of the Long Knives. Papen was placed under house arrest by the SS and, seeing his precarious position, soon resigned his position.



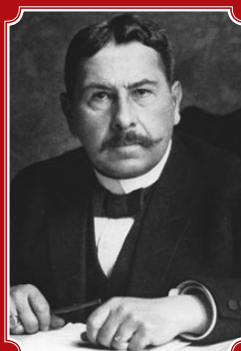
HERBERT VON BOSE

Although von Papen escaped the Night of the Long Knives with his life, those around him were not so lucky. His press secretary, Herbert von Bose, was gunned down from behind when the SS occupied the office of the vice-chancellor.



KURT VON SCHLEICHER

The chancellor who preceded Hitler was a close friend of Ernst Röhm and had been scheming with some of Hitler's rivals within the Nazi Party. He was shot at his home by SS assassins, along with his wife, after he answered a knock at the door.



GUSTAV RITTER VON KAHR

Eleven years earlier, as state commissioner of Bavaria, Kahr had put down the Beer Hall Putsch. Hitler seized the opportunity for revenge in the Night of the Long Knives, despite Kahr no longer being in public service and no threat to Hitler and his regime.



WILLI SCHMID

In a tragic case of mistaken identity, music critic Willi Schmid was killed by the SS after they confused him with Ludwig Schmitt, a supporter of Hitler's opponent Otto Strasser. Rudolf Hess visited Schmid's widow a few days later to offer his condolences.



Chamberlain's appeasement succeeded in preventing war in Europe, but the peace it gained was short-lived

MUNICH CONFERENCE 30 SEPTEMBER 1938

"PEACE FOR OUR TIME" LEADS TO THE BETRAYAL OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND FATAL OVERCONFIDENCE IN THE FÜHRER

When British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain stepped off a plane at Heston Aerodrome waving a piece of paper in the air, he celebrated "peace for our time". Hitler too was ecstatic, but the German leader did not celebrate peace – rather that he had outmanoeuvred the British once again. Ever since Hitler had taken power in 1933, he had pushed the boundaries of foreign policy. He sent troops into the Rhineland, acting against the Treaty of Versailles, and increased German armed forces far beyond the limits allowed. Then he annexed Austria, creating a larger German homeland, all with little more than a grumble from London and Paris. Next on Hitler's agenda was the Sudetenland. The northern and western portions of Czechoslovakia contained a majority of ethnic Germans and Hitler argued that the land belonged in the German Reich. He orchestrated unrest in the Sudetenland in order that he

could make clear that Germany was prepared to intervene in order to keep the peace.

With war looming, Chamberlain flew to Munich to try to negotiate a solution. It was the height of appeasement, a policy which was popular in Britain where there was no appetite for conflict so soon after the Great War, but which has since become a byword for naive failure. Chamberlain and Hitler carved up Czechoslovakia, agreeing that Germany could annex the Sudetenland as long as they respected the future border between the two countries. When Hitler and Chamberlain signed the piece of paper, sighs of relief could be heard across Europe. However, the Czechoslovaks themselves – allies of Britain and France – were not consulted and regarded the conference as the 'Munich Betrayal'. What Chamberlain saw as a successful negotiated settlement, Hitler saw as a sign of weakness. He regarded the Munich

"WHAT CHAMBERLAIN SAW AS A SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT, HITLER SAW AS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS [...] AS PROOF THAT BRITAIN HAD NO STOMACH FOR A FIGHT"

Conference as proof that Britain had no stomach for a fight and broke the agreement within six months, sending German troops into the rest of Czechoslovakia. However, the Munich Agreement also led to overconfidence in the Führer. Such was his belief in British dedication to appeasement that he did not expect Chamberlain to follow up on his guarantee of Polish neutrality by declaring war in September 1939, nor did he expect the British to fight on alone after Dunkirk. Although the Munich Conference was a success in terms of seizing Czechoslovakia, it also contributed to Germany and Britain sliding into world war.

SECOND COMPIÈGNE

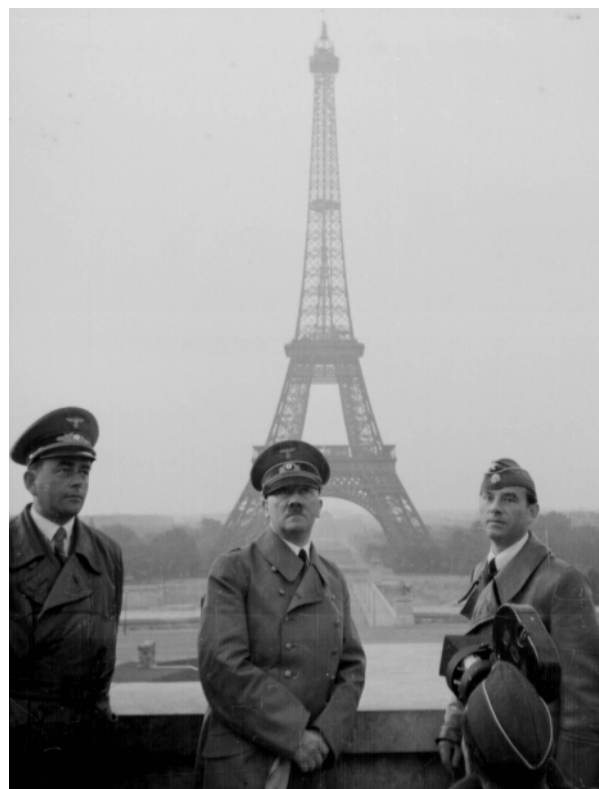
21-22 JUNE 1940

HITLER IS MORE POPULAR THAN EVER AFTER VICTORY IN THE BATTLE OF FRANCE

When Hitler met with representatives of the French army and government to conclude an armistice in June 1940, the choice of location was very deliberate. Compiègne Forest was the place where, 22 years earlier, Germany had surrendered to the Allies and signed the armistice to end World War I. Hitler ordered that the same rail carriage be used and sat in the seat in which Marshal Foch dictated terms to Germany. Then, in a gesture of disdain towards the defeated French, Hitler left the carriage and allowed his subordinates to oversee the terms of the armistice. Revenge for the German humiliation of 1918 was now complete. Rather than stay to sign the armistice agreement, Hitler seized the opportunity for a propaganda

coup. He travelled to Paris and was photographed in front of the Eiffel Tower, the most famous of French landmarks. The statement was clear: France was now under German control.

Germany had conquered her old enemy in just six weeks with the loss of just 27,000 German lives – Hitler had initially thought as many as 1 million Germans might die in the invasion. When Hitler returned to Berlin a few days later, he was greeted by a wave of support and enthusiasm for war. Both the Nazis and their Führer were at a peak of popularity and, for the moment at least, the German war machine looked unstoppable with only Britain remaining in the fight. German domination of Europe seemed assured.



Right: The lift cables of the Eiffel Tower were cut by the French to try to prevent a German flag being flown from the top

“THE STATEMENT WAS CLEAR: FRANCE WAS NOW UNDER GERMAN CONTROL”

German troops faced little resistance when they entered Paris on 14 June



THE FINAL SOLUTION

18 DECEMBER 1941

THE FATE OF EUROPE'S JEWS IS SEALED IN A MEETING BETWEEN THE FÜHRER AND HIS SS CRONY

When Heinrich Himmler met Hitler in December 1941, he asked the Führer what should be done about the Jews in occupied Russia. According to Himmler's notes, Hitler's answer was a blunt one: "exterminate them as partisans". It is as close as historians are likely to get to finding a direct order from Hitler for the genocide of the Jews – Hitler was careful never to leave a paper trail definitively linking him with what Nazi leaders euphemistically called the Final Solution.

The mass murder of Europe's Jews cannot be attributed to a single decision at a particular moment in time and Jews had been killed by the Reich for years before Hitler's statement to Himmler, but Hitler's green light accelerated the process.

Methods of killing changed, shifting from mobile killing squads of SS soldiers to the construction of extermination camps which used gas chambers to achieve the quotas set by the Nazi leaders. These notorious centres became chillingly efficient in the murder of the forcibly deported Jews and other 'undesirables' who were transported to the camp gates by rail. By the time the war ended, two-thirds of the Jewish population of Europe had lost their lives to the Holocaust.



Jews arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau are separated and sent to work or direct to the gas chamber

SECOND BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

23 OCTOBER - 11 NOVEMBER 1942

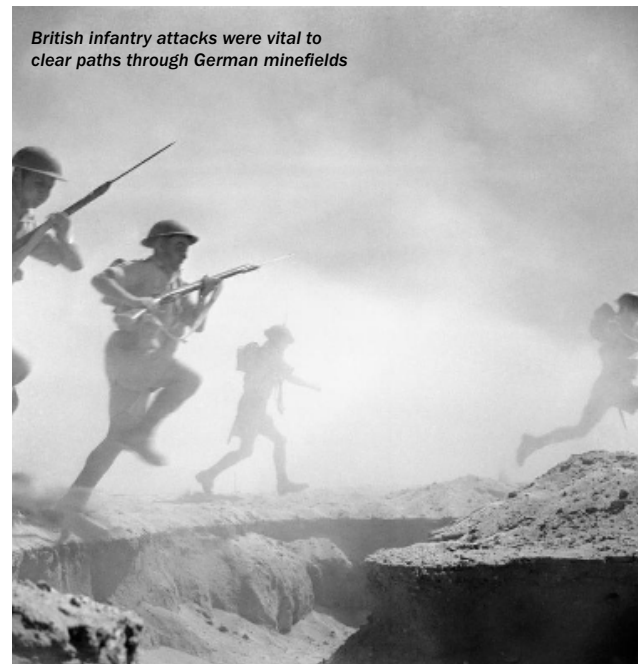
GERMAN DEFEAT IS A TURNING POINT IN BOTH THE DESERT WAR AND HITLER'S ATTITUDE TO HIS ARMED FORCES

For two years, fighting had see-sawed across North Africa as the German Afrika Korps clashed with the British Eighth Army. By late 1942, General Erwin Rommel – possibly the most able German commander of the war – had pushed the British troops back to a railway halt at El Alamein in Egypt. Rommel, the Desert Fox, threatened to roll the British right out of North Africa entirely, seizing control of the Suez Canal and the rich oil fields of the Middle East.

However, Rommel was now up against General Bernard Montgomery, who had taken command of the Eighth Army in August 1942. Montgomery planned a counterstrike against the Germans to relieve pressure on Egypt, and his attack came in two phases. First, Operation Lightfoot saw a powerful artillery bombardment followed by infantry attacks in two places to cut two corridors through German minefields. This was followed by Operation Supercharge, during which British tanks were let loose to destroy

their German counterparts and any enemy fortifications. Although Rommel's Afrika Korps put up a strong fight, the scale of losses and shortages of petrol soon crippled him and he began to retreat, despite Hitler's orders to "stand and die".

It was a turning point in the desert war. The Afrika Korps was pushed further and further back until the Germans were ejected from North Africa. However, El Alamein was not just a defining moment in one theatre of war; it also marked a turning point in Hitler's attitude to the army. Even Rommel, the Reich's greatest war hero, had ignored Hitler's orders, and the Führer became inherently distrustful of the army's high command. After El Alamein, Hitler intervened more in tactical and strategic matters, and – perhaps as a result of his constant interference – Germany won few victories. Whether on the Eastern Front or in Western Europe after the D-Day landings, Germany's high command had to cope with the Führer's increasingly desperate meddling.



British infantry attacks were vital to clear paths through German minefields

TARGET: HITLER

CLAUS VON STAUFFENBERG CAME THE CLOSEST TO ALTERING THE COURSE OF HISTORY, BUT THERE WERE MANY OTHER ASSASSINS WHO WANTED TO END HITLER'S LIFE



MAURICE BAVAUD

Theology student Maurice Bavaud was convinced that Hitler was the incarnation of Satan and determined to gun him down at a parade through Munich. However, he could not get a clean shot so the would-be assassin slinked away, only to be arrested on a train. Bavaud confessed all to the Gestapo and was executed three years later.



GEORG ELSER

Georg Elser's plan was to install a bomb with a 144-hour timer that would explode at the Bürgerbräukeller brewery in Munich during Hitler's speech to commemorate the anniversary of the Beer Hall Putsch. Unfortunately for Elser, Hitler moved the start time of his speech and the bomb exploded 13 minutes after he finished.



HENNING VON TRESCKOW

When disillusioned officer Henning von Tresckow asked a member of Hitler's entourage to take two bottles of brandy to a friend in Berlin, it was actually a disguised bomb to bring down the Führer's plane. However, the fuse malfunctioned. Tresckow continued plotting and was later implicated in Operation Valkyrie.



RUDOLF VON GERSDORFF

A co-conspirator of Tresckow, Gersdorff made his own attempt on the Führer's life eight days after the failed bombing. He carried a bomb on his person at an exhibition in Berlin, but Hitler slipped away before the fuse detonated. Gersdorff dashed to a toilet and defused the bomb.



AXEL VON DEM BUSSCHE

Axel von dem Bussche's crude but simple plan was to grab Hitler in a bear hug and detonate a landmine in his pocket while modelling new winter uniforms to the Führer in late 1943. However, the night before the scheduled viewing, the new uniforms were destroyed in a bombing raid – Allied bombers may have saved Hitler's life.



EBERHARD VON BREITENBUCH

Army officer Eberhard von Breitenbuch agreed to assassinate Hitler with a shot to the head using a concealed pistol during a meeting at the Berghof. However, the plan fell apart when Breitenbuch discovered that his rank was too low to allow him into the conference room – the rules had been changed earlier that day.

OPERATION VALKYRIE

20 JULY 1944

HITLER'S FORTUITOUS SURVIVAL CONDEMNS GERMANY TO ANOTHER YEAR OF WAR AND SLOW DEFEAT

When Claus von Stauffenberg planted a bomb at Hitler's Eastern Front headquarters, he hoped to change the course of the war. The explosion did lead to the deaths of nearly 5,000 people, but the primary target was not among them. Hitler had survived, condemning Germany to another year of warfare. Stauffenberg was one of a group of senior military figures who believed that Hitler was dooming Germany to defeat. They wanted to open negotiations with the Allies, but recognised that this could only occur with the removal of Hitler, who would never accept Germany's surrender.

On 20 July 1944, Stauffenberg walked into a briefing room at the Wolf's Lair in East Prussia and placed a briefcase containing a single bomb linked to a ten-minute detonator. He had hoped to put a second bomb in the briefcase but had been interrupted as he armed it in a nearby toilet. Stauffenberg then left the briefing to answer a pre-arranged telephone call, but while he was gone a colonel shifted the briefcase behind a table

leg with his foot. When the bomb detonated, the table leg shielded Hitler from the worst of the blast, although he did suffer a perforated eardrum and his trousers were shredded. Four of the 21 people in the room were killed.

Stauffenberg escaped the Wolf's Lair and pressed ahead with the next stage of Operation Valkyrie, a military seizure of power. However, news filtered through that Hitler had survived and the coup soon collapsed with Stauffenberg arrested and summarily executed within 12 hours of the bomb detonating. Yet Hitler wanted more than one man to pay the price. He recognised that the plot involved a network of high-ranking officers. More than 7,000 people were arrested by the Gestapo, many of whom were unconnected to the plot, and nearly 5,000 were executed or committed suicide. Among the victims of the investigation was Erwin Rommel, who chose suicide after his arrest in October 1944. Hitler survived Operation Valkyrie and strengthened his grip on power in the purges which followed, but it came at the cost of a weakened military.

"THE EXPLOSION DID LEAD TO THE DEATHS OF NEARLY 5,000 PEOPLE, BUT THE PRIMARY TARGET WAS NOT AMONG THEM. HITLER HAD SURVIVED"



Hitler and Benito Mussolini survey the destruction in the briefing room where the Führer escaped death

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

29 APRIL 1945

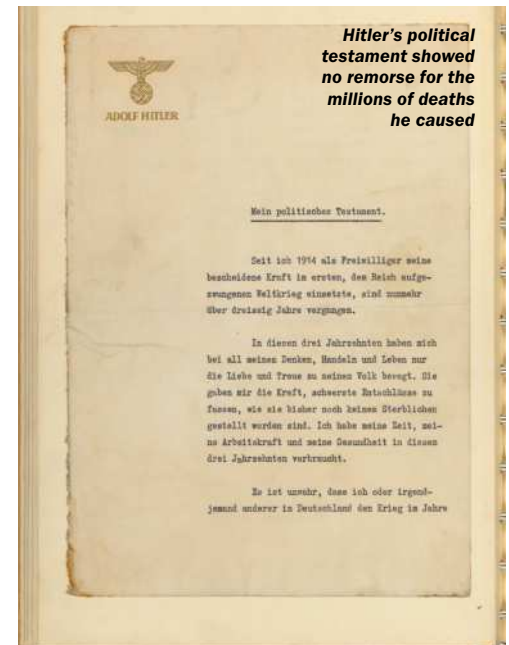
HITLER'S REIGN OF EVIL IS FINALLY OVER, BUT THE MAN HIMSELF IS UTTERLY UNREPENTANT

Hitler's 56th birthday, 20 April 1945, was no occasion for celebration. The leader of the German Reich had been stranded in the Führerbunker in Berlin for the last three months as Allied forces closed in from all sides. Over the course of the next few days, Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler were stripped of their titles as they distanced themselves from Hitler and his dying regime – but they were titles that meant little anyway as the Reich crumbled.

On 29 April, Hitler married Eva Braun and retired to a small room in the bunker with his secretary, Traudl Junge, to dictate his last will and testament. In it, Hitler continued to rail against the Jews and remained wholeheartedly convinced in the National Socialist cause. He passed control of the Reich to Karl Dönitz, head of the German navy, while Joseph Goebbels – the only leading

member of government to remain with Hitler in the bunker – was appointed chancellor. Dönitz would surrender to the Allies within a week, Goebbels would commit suicide with his wife and six children even before then. Around 36 hours after signing the will, during which Hitler learned of the death of Mussolini and was told that the last loyal troops in Berlin were about to run out of ammunition, Hitler and his new wife said farewell to their few remaining staff and went into his personal study. An hour later, a single shot echoed through the underground complex.

Hitler's valet opened the door and found both of them dead – Eva had swallowed a cyanide capsule, Hitler had shot himself in the head. But, as his last will and testament proves, Hitler died unrepentant, convinced in the righteousness of his twisted ideology to the very end.



Hitler's political testament showed no remorse for the millions of deaths he caused



Winston Churchill, Hitler's nemesis, visits the scene of his opponent's death

THE EARLY YEARS

From his mother's death to his experiences during the Great War, Hitler's early years would help produce one of history's most notorious dictators

20 CREATING A MONSTER

How Hitler's formative years shaped him

28 THE RISE OF EVIL HITLER

From riots to repression - how Hitler came to power



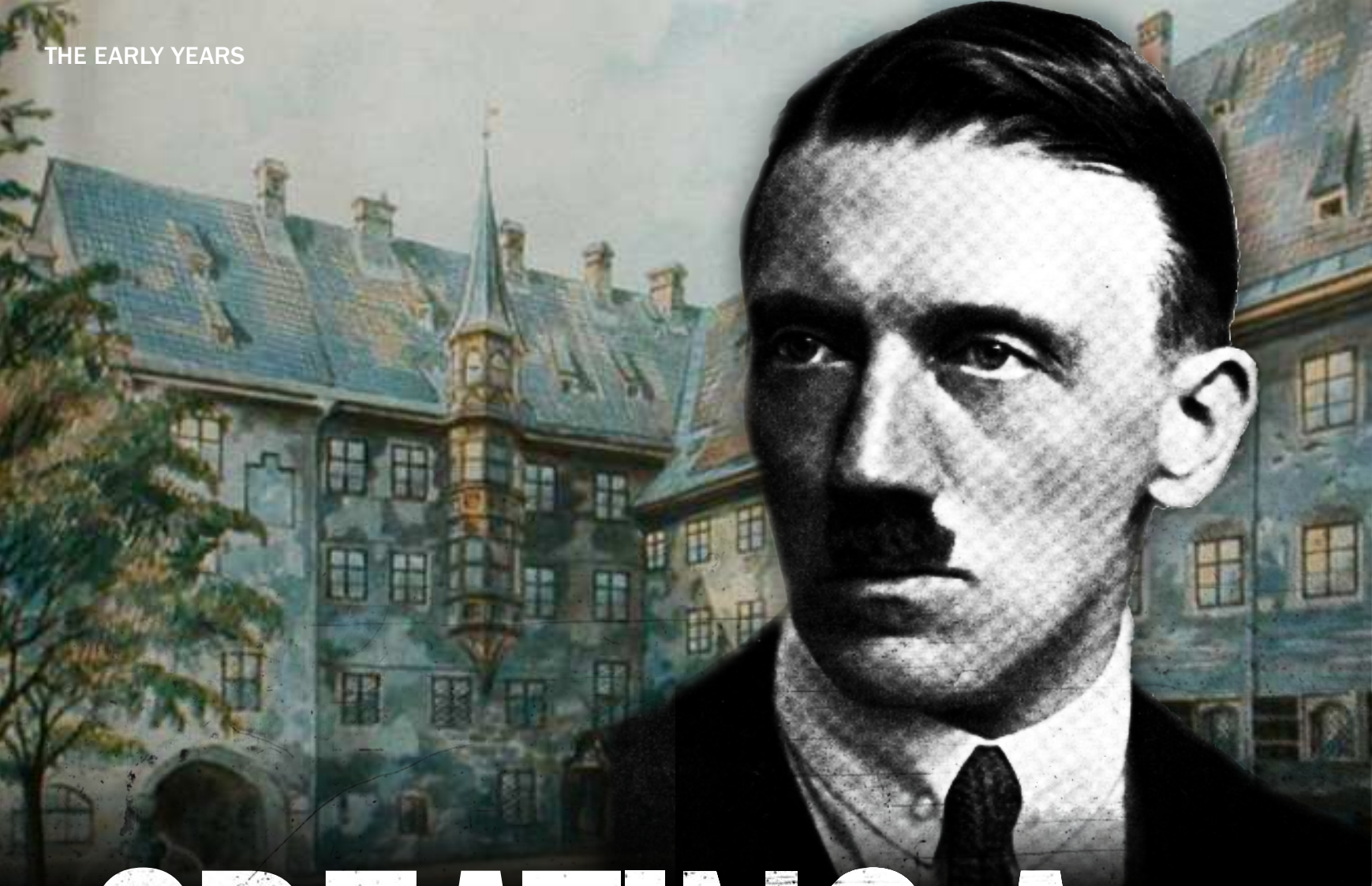
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“HITLER HAD BLED FOR HIS COUNTRY, AND NOW IT WAS FORCED TO ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WAR. IT LEFT HIM DEEPLY SADDENED AND HARBOURING A RESENTMENT THAT SAW HIM LOOK ELSEWHERE FOR A TARGET TO BLAME”



CREATING A MONSTER

Before the Third Reich, the Holocaust and the Axis of Evil, there was a young Austrian who would experience privilege, poverty and war on his way to historical infamy

Even from the earliest age, the life of Adolf Hitler was one filled with conflict and contention. Born in Braunau am Inn, Austria, on 20 April 1889, the young Austrian was a precocious character constantly at odds with his father, Alois.

The patriarch of the Hitler family had a cold and uncompromising nature, his mid-level career in the civil service moulding him into a man who imposed a cast-iron order upon those around him. Alois wanted his son to follow him into the same occupation, but Hitler had no wish to live out his life chained to a desk. For him, the only desire he had in life was to paint and pursue his love of the arts.

It may sound bizarre, but from the end of the 1800s into the dawn of the 20th century, the younger self of one of history's most

brutal dictators was a novice painter who dreamed of making an impact on the artistic landscape of Western Europe. However, his world was rocked when his youngest brother Edmund died following a bout of measles. His relationship with his father now at an all time low, Hitler became detached from his family. Repulsed by his father's life of petty rules and bureaucracy, he began showing an interest in the growing nationalist wave bubbling within German society – one that rejected the Austro-Hungarian government that had held sway over it for so long.

His father's sudden death in 1903 seemingly failed to move Hitler and, with his older half-brothers having moved out long before, it wasn't long before the young Adolf, his sister Paula and mother Klara moved to the city of Linz. There the three Hitlers lived on

the late patriarch's meagre pension while Hitler continued his love of painting. Hitler's relationship with his mother was the opposite of the one he'd held with his late father, with Klara even allowing her son to drop out of school in 1905 to pursue a career in fine art. His mother's support galvanised Hitler, and it fostered a bond between them that had been painfully absent elsewhere.

Two years later, his world would be turned upside down. His mother had fallen ill and was soon diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer. Hitler watched his mother slowly succumb to the disease, including a long and excruciating iodoform treatment that would eventually lead to her death in 1907. Hitler and his sister were at her side when she died, and her passing tore the young Austrian's heart in two. Yet even in her dying months, Klara had



Hitler's family moved to Passau, Germany where he acquired the distinctive lower Bavarian dialect that would stay with him for life

DID HITLER HAVE JEWISH ANCESTRY?

Perhaps one of the most contentious issues debated by historians, Hitler's own ancestry feels all the more pertinent considering his orchestration of a genocide based on his hatred for the Jewish community. Much of the issue surrounding whether Hitler himself had traceable Jewish ancestors revolves around his father's name change. Alois Hitler Sr was born Alois Schicklgruber, having taken his mother's maiden name upon his birth. The particulars of his father were never recorded on Alois' birth certificate, a fact that would haunt Adolf's father long into his later life. The rumour centred around Alois' mother having worked as a housekeeper for the Frankenbergers – a Jewish family based in Graz – around the time he was conceived. The theory states that 19-year-old Leopold Frankenger was in fact Alois' father and that his mother had left their employ in disgrace. However, no record has ever been found to support such a claim. Alois' mother did eventually marry one Johann Georg Hiedler in 1842, with the new man in her life raising the young Alois as his own. Over three decades later, Alois would be baptised as Catholic, taking his step-father's surname as his own. The records of this event are also the first to show the spelling of his name as 'Hitler', as well as officially recognising the late Johann Georg Hiedler (who passed away in 1857) as his paternal father.



Above: The truth behind Adolf Hitler's true grandfather has never been solved, but most historians agree he likely wasn't Jewish

THE EARLY YEARS

still supported Hitler's love of art, allowing him to sit an exam for the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts while she deteriorated at home.

Hitler failed to gain entrance into the Academy, but in the wake of his mother's death he refused to be discouraged and moved from the family apartment to Vienna in the hope of reapplying to the school. He did indeed try to gain another place in the esteemed arts faculty, but was rejected a second time in 1908. Having frittered away what money was left of his inheritance, Hitler was soon living out of hostels and struggling to survive on the streets. His new-found poverty may have been somewhat self-inflicted, but there was a growing resentment burning within Hitler and it needed to be pointed somewhere.

Hitler would later cite his time in Vienna as an impoverished experience that opened his eyes to the plight of the working man underneath the heel of an elitist Jewish class above. Hitler had grown up in a middle-class family and had rarely known monetary hardship, and his wider family had continued to appeal to him to abandon his fruitless career in art and take a stable role in the civil service like his father. Hitler stonewalled any attempts to influence him, and he was soon swept up in the growing sense of anti-Semitism that was simmering within Germany, Austria and beyond.

It would be here, in a city that Hitler hoped would be the making of him as a painter that he would experience his first taste of politics and the power such a position could hold over the people. During his years in Vienna, Hitler himself would fall under the political influence of two very different figures: Pan-German politician Georg von Schönerer, and Karl Lueger, Mayor of Vienna at the time. Von Schönerer propagated a fierce ideology of German nationalism that painted the Jewish community as a cancer eating the country from within.

Von Schönerer's vitriol struck a chord with Hitler, now in his early twenties, despite the fact some of his own clients were Jews, and he found himself consumed with Germany's increasingly vocal and popular far-right movement. It was at this time that Hitler first came across the concept of Aryan values. Yet while von Schönerer's bitter resentment for Jews was felt through Austrian legislation from on high, it would be at ground level that Hitler would embrace the racist poison beginning to course through the heart of his country.

"VON SCHÖNERER'S VITRIOL STRUCK A CHORD WITH HITLER, DESPITE THE FACT SOME OF HIS OWN CLIENTS WERE JEWS, AND HE FOUND HIMSELF CONSUMED WITH GERMANY'S INCREASINGLY VOCAL AND POPULAR FAR-RIGHT MOVEMENT"

The man who would have perhaps the greatest influence over the young Adolf Hitler was one Karl Lueger. The Mayor of Vienna upon Hitler's arrival in the city, Lueger helped transform Vienna's economy and had formed his Austrian wing of the Christian Social Party. Built upon the same Pan-German rationale as von Schönerer's similar politics, Lueger expressed his own resolute anti-Semitism less through ideology and more through his grander plan to rebuild Vienna as the crown jewel of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Lueger was also a talented orator who could hold sway over almost any crowd or group before him; it enabled him to unite his political rivals into one of the most powerful political parties in the country's history, as well as enabling him to perpetuate his vision

of nationalism to the people of Austria. Hitler was enraptured and it would be here that many of his most recognisable attributes as a leader would find their inspirational origins. Historians have long argued over the origins of Hitler's hatred of the Jews, but it's clear the seeds of his later policies were slowly sown during his time in Vienna.

By 1913, Hitler gained access to the final part of his father's estate and moved to a new apartment across the border in Munich. It's believed Hitler moved to Germany to avoid being conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian Army, with the man himself stating he did not wish to serve in a military force comprising so many races and religious beliefs. However, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was already on the verge of conflict with the Russian Empire,

Of all the figures from Hitler's pre-military days, his mother Klara would remain his most supportive and influential





Even before the outbreak of WWI, Hitler was becoming less and less concerned with painting and more involved in politics

the French Third Republic and the United Kingdom, so the young Hitler was to soon see conflict regardless.

One year later, World War I erupted in Europe and Hitler volunteered for the Bavarian Army. He was soon accepted, despite being an Austrian citizen at the time (it's genuinely believed that this was down to a clerical error as Hitler should have been returned to Austria rather than be granted a place in the Bavarian Army), and was soon shipped off to war with the Allies. And it would be here, in the crucible of conflict (and the aftermath that followed) – that the Adolf Hitler the world would come to know began to emerge.

Hitler's military career remains another area of contention for historians (with many believing he played up his own contributions to better establish his image in his later years in politics), but his four years fighting for the Austro-Hungarian Empire (otherwise known as the Central Powers) during WWI was the catalyst that helped calcify his love for his country. He was present at a number of major battles during the war, where he was enlisted as a dispatch runner at the First Battle of Ypres, the Battle of the Somme, the Battle of Arras and the Battle of Passchendaele. It was here that Hitler not only saw the real cost of war, but what it was like to fight on a side that would ultimately be bested.

In October 1916, while serving at the Battle of the Somme, Hitler was injured by a shell that exploded in a dispatch runner's dugout he was taking shelter in. The explosion tore into his left thigh and left him hospitalised for over two months before returning to duty the following year. Hitler continued his work as a dispatch runner, but he was later removed from the front again when a mustard attack left him temporarily blinded in 1918. As his sight began to return while recovering in a hospital in the German town of Pasewalk, news reached Hitler that his country had lost the war. The Allies were victorious. Germany and its brethren had been humiliated.

Upon entering the war, Hitler was a man who had become increasingly affected with the state of his country's internal politics, but as he emerged from a second spell in a military hospital the state of his nation in the eyes of the rest of the world became a greater concern. The Treaty of Versailles, which effectively dismantled Germany's military and crushed its already collapsing post-war economy, felt like a kick in the teeth for Germans, Hungarians and Austrians such as Hitler.

The medals pinned to his chest hung heavy as the sound of Germany's official surrender rung in his ears. Like many Germans, especially those who fought in the war and survived, the loss of the Great War was a

deeply embittering experience. Hitler had bled for his country, and now it was forced to accept responsibility for the war. It left him deeply saddened and harbouring a resentment that saw him look elsewhere for a target to blame.

Upon Germany's defeat, Hitler remained in the army and returned to his home in Munich to start a new position as a Verbindungsmann (intelligence agent) of the Reichswehr (a domestic defence agency formed in the wake of the Treaty of Versailles). In his new role, he was able to take his seething resentment and use it to infiltrate the German Workers' Party (DAP), a National Socialist movement that had gained considerable traction in Germany following the war.

Hitler embedded himself in the party, attending secret rallies and meetings for years as he reported back to his military taskmasters. But his time surrounded by the policies of the DAP was having a radical effect on the man who had once been enraptured by Karl Lueger before the war. The ideology of the DAP – especially that of its charismatic founder, Anton Drexler – was slowly terraforming Hitler's own resentment and shame. Its anti-Semitic, nationalist, anti-capitalist, and anti-Marxist ideas lit a fire beneath him, as did its desire for Germany to assume an active government with a cast-iron, consciously non-Jewish version of socialism.

THE EARLY YEARS



Hitler served for the entirety of the war, although a large proportion of his experiences took place well away from the frontlines

Hitler was no meek presence, and his strong (and increasingly genuine) views during debates and rallies caught the attention of Drexler himself. So much so that the DAP leader eventually invited Hitler to join the party in October 1919. Hitler was still serving as an agent for the military, but he was increasingly pouring his energies into the party. It was at this time that Hitler was taken under the wing of one Dietrich Eckart, a German journalist and poet who had fast become one of the most influential voices in the DAP. Under Eckart's mentorship, Hitler was now one of the party's most powerful speakers – and when the party was rebranded as the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party/NSDAP), it was Hitler who redesigned the party's logo as a swastika.

When Hitler was discharged from the army in March 1920, he was finally free to devote every ounce of his energy to the Nazi Party. With Hitler and Eckart as their loudest and most influential voices, the party was making no attempt to hide its contempt for the makeshift government that had been formed in the wake of Germany's defeat two years earlier. To Hitler and his compatriots, the Weimar Republic

was an insult to German society and needed to be fixed in order to usher in a new age of prosperity for the nation.

Even now, barely into his thirties, Adolf Hitler had risen from a politically intrigued former artist and war veteran to a powerful public speaker. He'd become the de-facto face of the Nazi Party, but not every member shared his vitriolic views. So when Hitler was away in Berlin seeking fresh support for the Nazis in July 1921, a coup of sorts was formed in an attempt to merge the party with one of its largest rivals – the German Socialist Party (DSP). Upon his return, Hitler refused to accept a party that would so willingly undermine its own principles and resigned.

With the Nazi party seemingly in disarray, Hitler saw his opportunity to take power not figuratively, but absolutely. He agreed to stay with the party, but only if he was made leader over Drexler and that the party's headquarters would remain in Munich (a hotbed for the National Socialist movement). Realising the resignation of its most significant figurehead would effectively kill the party dead, its members agreed and in July 1921 Adolf Hitler became the party chairman of the Nazi Party.

Hitler (far right, seated) served with the Bavarian Reserve Infantry, despite being an Austrian citizen at the time of his application



Now the most powerful man in one of the most active political parties in Germany, Hitler continued to speak in beer halls and private homes, drawing large crowds as he extolled the virtues of the German people and the need to find the true 'scapegoats' for the nation's plight and its fate in the Great War. His presence sparked very different responses – some found him deeply inspirational, with cheers of 'Sieg Heil!' often breaking out during his speeches, while others left feeling decidedly unmoved by his hate-fuelled rants.

It was here, as Hitler's power base began to rise, that the foundations of the Nazi Party that would later assume power in Germany was born. His populist ideas and rousing speeches had made him the talk of Germany and beyond. Newspapers covered his appearances, while authorities both domestic and foreign were unable to ignore the right-wing wave that was rising beneath figures such as Adolf Hitler.

The Nazi Party chairman was also amassing a close cabal of followers, including Rudolf Hess, Hermann Göring and Ernst Röhm.

And it would be Röhm, as the head of the party's newly formed paramilitary enforcers (the Sturmabteilung, or 'Stormtroopers'), who would introduce Hitler to one of the driving forces of his aggressive campaign to excise the Jews following his later ascension to power: the theory of a global Jewish conspiracy that aimed to destabilise the governments of Europe and bring about a new Bolshevik regime. All of this, and the lingering ghost of Germany's once imposing past, proved one thing to Hitler: actions would forever speak louder than words.

It would be this atmosphere of frustration and resentment for the way Germany's government continued to lay down and whimper in the eyes of its foreign neighbours that would lead Hitler to coordinate the Beer Hall Putsch in November 1923. Decades of experience

had shaped the man he'd become in that attempted coup of Bavaria – a man who had become both a vitriolic populist screaming from a lectern and an opportunistic leader who hoped to use the same tactics that gained him the leadership of the Nazi Party to assume a true position of power in Germany.

Of course, history will show the attempted coup – where Hitler, the SA and 2,000 Nazis stormed a meeting held by Gustav Ritter von Kahr, Bavaria's state commissioner, declaring a revolution and the installation of a new National Socialist government (only to later clash with police and ultimately be imprisoned) – to be a failure, but it would ultimately prove the catalyst Hitler needed to transform his persona into a national presence. From his prison cell, Hitler began dictating a new transcript, one that would form both a highly embellished autobiography and a treatise on his vision of a new Germany to come.



While his main role in the war was delivering dispatches and communications to and from the front, he still witnessed plenty of combat

THE BEER HALL PUTSCH

Often described as the act that ultimately solidified Hitler's transformation into a national figurehead – despite its outright logistical failure – the Beer Hall Putsch in 1923 was his first attempt to overthrow the stagnant regime that had been installed following Germany's defeat to the Allies in the previous decade. But what convinced the populist political leader that such a move could really work?

His experience as a war veteran was one such driving force, but such memories manifested themselves in a far different form to the Hitler of the early 1920s. He was no longer a dispatch runner evading gunfire and mortar shells on the frontlines, now he was a leader with hundreds of followers in both government and the people. He now had a paramilitary force of his own, the SA, that were at his beck and call and were often used to attack known socialist groups in order to destabilise their hold in Munich and beyond.

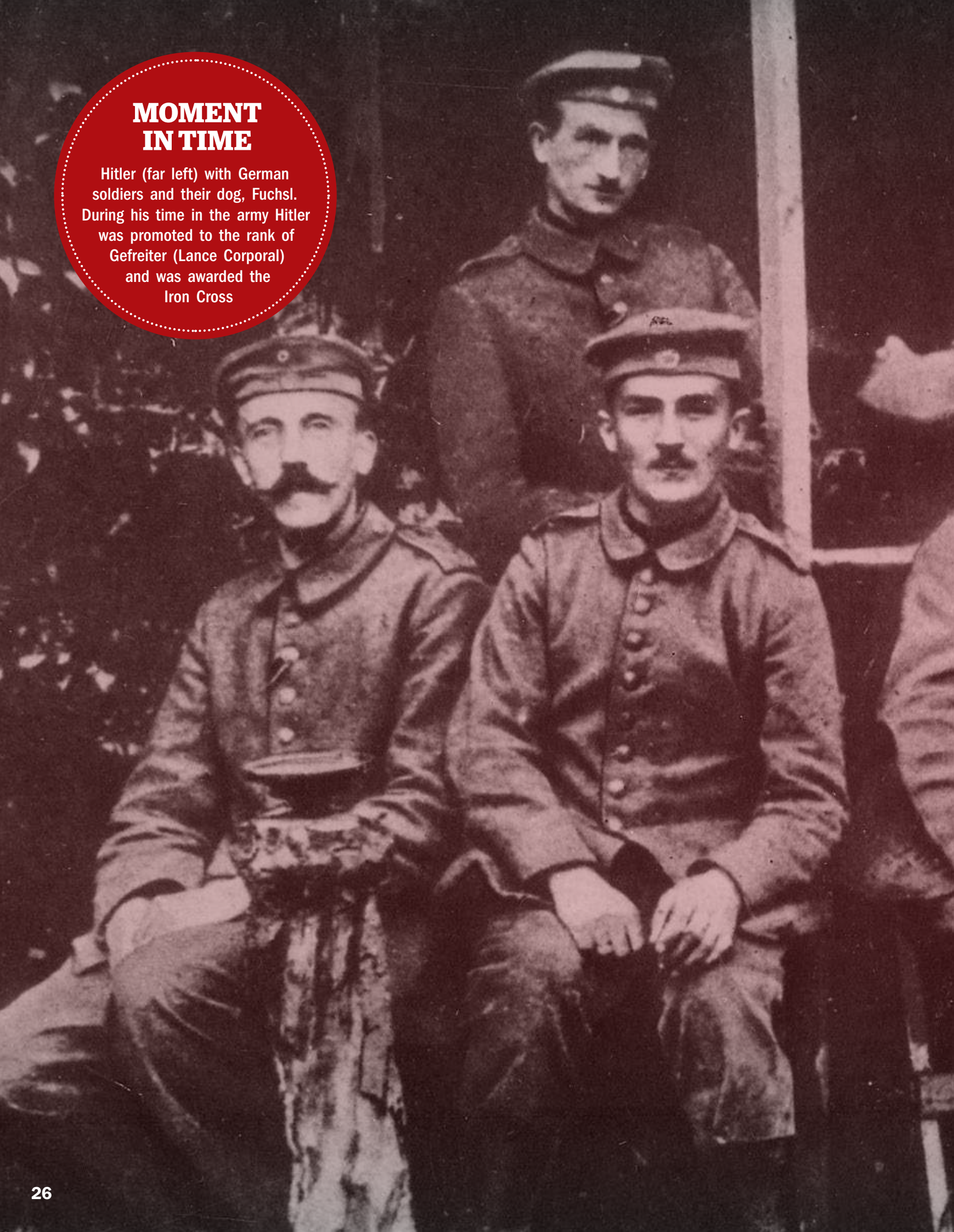
There's also the theory that Hitler knew the coup would never work, and that its very attempt was enough to take his local machinations and raise them to national status. If such a theory were true, it was a dangerous one as the clashes between the 2,000 Nazis at his command and the Bavarian police took the lives of 16 Nazis and four policemen. It was a risk, and one that ultimately played well in Hitler's favour.



Above: The coup itself, his arrest, trial and ultimate imprisonment all helped elevate Hitler's National Socialist message to a national level

MOMENT IN TIME

Hitler (far left) with German soldiers and their dog, Fuchsl. During his time in the army Hitler was promoted to the rank of Gefreiter (Lance Corporal) and was awarded the Iron Cross









THE RISE OF EVIL HITLER

How the demagogue used riots, racism
and repression in his quest to restore
German “greatness”

To hear Hitler tell the story in his 1925 autobiography *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*), the course of his entire life – right from birth – had led to his dictatorship of Germany from 1933-45. The forces of destiny had carefully planned it all – he was a man marked by fate to lead the nation of Germany. But, in truth, history is rarely as neat as that, and Hitler’s extraordinary rise to rule the totalitarian Nazi state in the 1930s and then lead the German people to war and almost total destruction is far more complex. Instead it is a story that grew from the human tragedy of World War I and the social, economic and political chaos of its aftermath, a nation drawn to extremes in its pursuit of a new beginning, and the capacity of a broken man and his circle of followers to sell a myth of national rebirth to an intelligent, cultured but equally war-scarred nation.

The years from 1924, when Hitler was released from a short stint in prison, up to 1934 and the infamous bloodletting of the Night of the Long Knives mark the key period in Hitler’s rise to power.

When he emerged from Landsberg Prison in the south-western Bavarian town of Landsberg am Lech on 20 December 1924, he had served only nine months of a five-year sentence for treason for his role in the Beer Hall Putsch on 8-9 November 1923. It was an attempt by the fledgling Nazi Party (which had only formed in 1919) and a handful of fellow right-wing travellers to overthrow the hated Weimar government. Hitler’s court trial, presided over by a pro-Nazi judge, had served only to provide him with a far-reaching public platform from which to broadcast his views, especially since the trial was being eagerly reported in the national newspapers.

He not only admitted his guilt in the Putsch but in fact relished in it. “I have resolved to be the destroyer of Marxism,” he proclaimed confidently from the dock, appointing himself the ‘strong man’ who many on the right believed Germany needed in order to emerge from the chaos and misery of its wartime years. Post-Putsch, he no longer saw himself as the ‘drummer’, preparing the path for the coming leader. Instead, he was the Führer himself.

Hitler, along with Rudolf Hess (who would become Deputy Führer in 1933), passed his prison sentence quite comfortably. He was able to receive guests, and a number of his political colleagues who would later become prominent figures in the Third Reich – such as Ernst Röhm, Wilhelm Frick and Alfred Rosenberg – paid numerous visits. This allowed for a like-minded group to develop, for Hitler to continue to expound and hone his views, and for him to consolidate his role as party leader – all while behind prison walls. On top of this, Hitler also used the time to put together his political manifesto. In fact, he described prison as his “university paid for by the State.” The book was called *Mein Kampf* and in it he detailed a set of ideas that, at their core, changed little over the course of his life and formed the essential nucleus of National Socialist (Nazi) ideology. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler also reshaped his own history in order to reinforce the idea that destiny had called him to lead Germany.

He and many of his followers began to believe that he was on a “...near-messianic [mission]... to become the ‘Great Leader’ the nation awaited, who would expunge the ‘criminal betrayal of 1918’, restore Germany’s might and power, and create a reborn ‘Germanic State of the German nation’.” His autobiography saw the beginning of ‘the Führer Myth’ that would last for some Germans until the bitter end of the Nazi period in 1945. One sympathetic writer said in 1924, “What lies dormant in the soul of the German people has taken shape in full living features... That has appeared in Adolf Hitler: the living incarnation of the nation’s yearning.”



Hitler sits beside his newly appointed propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, at a rally in Stuttgart, 1933

“IT SEEMED THAT HITLER HAD TAPPED INTO A NUMBER OF COMMON BELIEFS IN MEIN KAMPF – HE HAD JUST TAKEN THEM TO THEIR EXTREMES”



The opening of the new Reichstag symbolised unity between the Nazi Party and the old Prussian military elite



THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC: DOOMED TO FAILURE

WHEN THE KAISER FLED, A NEW DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT WAS DECLARED IN THE SMALL TOWN OF WEIMAR

The Weimar Republic refers to the German state from 1919 to 1933. Many Germans on the right believed the Republic had allowed Germany to lose World War I by conceding defeat too soon. Many nationalists also espoused the 'stab in the back' theory, believing that Bolsheviks and Jews had weakened the home front with damaging modern ideas such as feminism. The 1919 Treaty of Versailles, which the Weimar government accepted, took territory from Germany, called for colossal reparations and laid the blame for igniting the war squarely at the feet of the Central Powers – Germany,

the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria.

Added to this, in 1923 the French occupied the Ruhr region of Germany, commandeering the district's rich raw materials. This was another mark against the Weimar government in the eyes of the right, along with the many black French colonial soldiers who were allowed as part of the Ruhr occupation force.

During the same period, Germany suffered from devastating hyperinflation. A large number of Germans lost their social status and were reduced to poverty. A solution

came in the form of the Dawes Plan in 1924, but the German economy was left dependent on loans from the USA. This would have serious ramifications when the Great Depression struck in 1929.

Finally, there were inherent problems within Germany's system of government. Germany had only become a unified country in 1871 and since that time had been a monarchy. Germany was governed by coalitions with no overall majority. This resulted in a series of weak, unstable governments and a lack of public confidence in the political system.

My struggle

Mein Kampf depicted a world characterised by constant struggle. All existence could be reduced to a battle between the strong and the weak.

"Those that want to live, let them fight, and those who do not want to fight in this world of eternal struggle do not deserve to live." Hitler argued for Social Darwinism, an interpretation of Darwin's theory of evolution applied to humanity and best summed up as 'survival of the fittest'. The foremost means of defining the strong and the weak was through the lens of race. As Hitler said in *Mein Kampf*, "The racial question gives the key not only to world history but to all human culture."

The Aryan was the greatest expression of humanity and the German ideal was characterised as being tall, well-built and healthy with blonde hair and blue eyes. The physical vitality of the Aryan was also expressed in their richly creative culture. For Hitler, Aryans were "the founders of culture". Their total opposite was the Jew. The Nazis depicted Jewry as a race not a religion that was unhealthy physically, mentally and spiritually.

Hitler argued that Jewry also lacked an original culture. While Aryans created culture, Jews invaded, imitated, corrupted and ultimately destroyed it. The Nazis argued this was what had recently happened in Germany. During World War I, while German men were away fighting, Jews undermined traditional German culture at home by introducing damaging modern ideas like Bolshevism and feminism. As a result, the home front collapsed and the war was lost. Here was the extreme right's infamous Dolchstoßlegende, or 'stab in the back' theory.

Jews, therefore, were the enemies of Germany and had to be eliminated from society. There

were varying suggestions as to what extent this 'elimination' should take place. So too, all German peoples throughout Europe needed to be united in a greater German state and in order to do this, more Lebensraum (living space) had to be acquired. As well as all this, the 'treachery' of the Treaty of Versailles needed to be redressed. Hitler's long-term goals were set.

There were conflicting views about *Mein Kampf* and Hitler's objectives. Economist Johannes Zahn said: "Reading *Mein Kampf* was exactly like belief in the demands of the Bible. These are demands but nobody believed they would be fulfilled one hundred per cent." Diplomat Manfred von Schröder

said that, "Nobody took it really seriously." Yet Johannes Zahn argued that Jewish influence "had gone too far" in Germany and Herbert Richter, who said that *Mein Kampf* was "too crazy" to even finish reading, also felt that the German territories lost in World War I should be returned. It seemed that Hitler had tapped into a number of common beliefs in *Mein Kampf* – he had just taken them to their extremes. The book sold poorly initially but by 1939 in Germany, it was selling

second only to the Bible, and by 1945, 10 million copies had been purchased.

The Beer Hall Putsch and Hitler's spell in prison also taught the Nazi Party that the only route to power was through the ballot box. Armed revolution was not the answer. Instead they would beat the system from within, by becoming a part of Germany's democratic system before gaining power and pulling democracy apart. As Hitler said, "If outvoting them takes longer than outshooting



NAZI PARTY

The birth of the National Socialist German Workers' Party

1918

World War I ends

The end of the Great War gives rise to the 'stab in the back' theory that the German Army was betrayed. An ultra-right element emerges on the German political scene.



German citizens riot in the port city of Kiel

1919

German Workers' Party forms

Anton Drexler, along with other anti-Semitic and nationalist activists, is a prime mover in the formation of the forerunner of the Nazi Party in Munich on 5 January 1919.



1919

Hitler joins German Workers' Party

Ordered by the army to infiltrate the German Workers' Party, Hitler instead joins the group as its 55th member, and begins his rapid rise to leadership.



Adolf Hitler's membership card

1920

Becoming the Nazis

The name of the group is formally changed to the National Socialist German Workers' Party, abbreviated as Nazi, and its first public meeting is held.

1921

Hitler on the rise

Using his gift for oratory, Hitler addresses a crowd of 6,000 people in Munich. Later this year, he's elected chairman of the Nazi Party.



1923

Beer Hall Putsch

The first Nazi Party Day is held. Several Nazi cohorts are killed, and Hitler is arrested and imprisoned following the abortive Beer Hall Putsch in Munich.



1924

A political platform

Hitler utilises his trial for treason as a platform to denounce the current political situation in Germany. He receives a five-year sentence in Landsberg Prison.

1925

Mein Kampf

While in prison, Hitler receives regular visitors, enjoys remarkable freedom, and dictates his manifesto, *Mein Kampf*, to his secretary, Rudolf Hess.



Hitler's book *Mein Kampf* became a bestseller in Germany

German National People's Party

The national conservative party gave Hitler a narrow voting majority

1918

Conservative concentration

The German National People's Party (DNVP) – a conservative organisation including several right-wing factions opposed to the Weimar government – is formed after World War I. It becomes the largest such party in Germany prior to expansion of the Nazis.



Emblem of the German National People's Party



EVOLUTION OF THE NAZI PARTY

1925

Electing the old general

The DNVP counts more than 20 per cent of German voters among its supporters and campaigns for the election of General Paul von Hindenburg as president of Germany.



Hindenburg's swearing-in ceremony, 1925

1928

Hard right turn

Alfred Hugenberg assumes leadership of the DNVP and turns sharply to the political right, increasing resistance to the Weimar government. The popularity of the Nazis begins to erode the DNVP power base.



Alfred Hugenberg, leader of the DNVP

Freikorps

How these German volunteer units became embroiled in the Nazi Party

1918

Up from defeat

Late in the year, the first paramilitary Freikorps units organise. Composed largely of former soldiers, the right-wing Freikorps oppose the Weimar Republic and leftist groups.



1919

Continuing unrest

At least 65 Freikorps units are organised across Germany. They engage in street violence and the suppression of communist and left-wing uprisings, often resorting to terror and murder.



1920

Reach for power

The Freikorps is supposedly disbanded but continues to operate for years to come. Some Freikorps leaders participate in the failed Kapp Putsch.



Right-wing nationalist Wolfgang Kapp

Reichswehr

Hitler's relationship with Germany's military was key to the Nazis' success

1919

Military reorganisation

Following the defeat of Germany in WWI, the armed forces of the Weimar Republic, the Reichswehr, are created from the Provisional National Army and Navy.



Reichswehr soldiers during a training exercise

1920

State within a state

The leadership of the army refuses to fully support the Weimar government, and General Hans von Seeckt, appointed chief of army command, begins to operate in a virtually autonomous manner.



General von Seeckt stands with Reichswehr officers

1920

Clandestine rebuilding

Although the Treaty of Versailles limits the size of the German army to 100,000, General von Seeckt conducts a clandestine campaign to build and maintain a "shadow army".

1925

Birth of the SS

The Schutzstaffel, or SS, is founded as protection for Hitler but evolves into a sizeable force with security, administrative, and military responsibilities.

1928

A landmark election

During Reichstag elections, the Nazi Party receives nearly three per cent of the vote, gaining them attention from other political groups and arousing interest in the party across Germany.



Germans with campaign posters

1930

A force in the Reichstag

During the national election, the Nazis receive 6 million votes and increase their representation in the Reichstag from 12 seats to 107.



A Nazi Party election poster

1932

Nazi presidential aspirations

Paul von Hindenburg, a hero of World War I, soundly defeats Hitler in the presidential election, although the Nazi candidate receives 37 per cent of the vote.



One of Hitler's election posters

1933

Terror on the march

Chancellor Franz von Papen lifts the ban on the SS and paramilitary Sturmabteilung, or SA. The Nazis receive 13.7 million votes during the election, achieving a Reichstag majority with 230 seats.



Members of the SA stand at attention prior to a parade

1933

Chancellor of Germany

Convinced that the Nazis can be controlled if their leader is included in a coalition government, President Hindenburg appoints Hitler as the chancellor of Germany.



This propaganda poster depicts Hindenburg and Hitler as leaders of government

1934

The Blood Purge

To appease the army and eliminate a perceived threat to his power, Hitler purges the SA leadership and settles old scores during the Night of the Long Knives.



1931

Co-operation and coalition

The DNVP begins co-operating with the Nazis, forming coalition governments, which leads to Hugenberg's appointment as minister of economics and agriculture under Chancellor Hitler two years later.



Chancellor Hitler sits with members of the Reich cabinet

1933

DNVP end game

Hugenberg advocates changing the DNVP name to the German National Front (DNF) to be more representative of the country's political landscape. However, its influence wanes and many members join the Nazis.



1922

Assassination as a political tool

Ex-members of a Freikorps unit assassinate Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau, whom they believe is sympathetic to the political left. Rathenau is also Jewish.



Rathenau was killed by a former Freikorps unit

1933

Allegiance to the Nazis

During a solemn ceremony, old Freikorps flags are handed to the leaders of the SA and SS in a symbolic union with the Nazi Party.



Nazi propaganda election poster, "Women! Save the German Family! Vote for Adolf Hitler!" c.1930

1933

Armed rivalry

After Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany, the Reichswehr continues its expansion. However, senior officers raise concerns about the growing power of the Sturmabteilung (SA), many times larger with approximately 3 million men.

1934

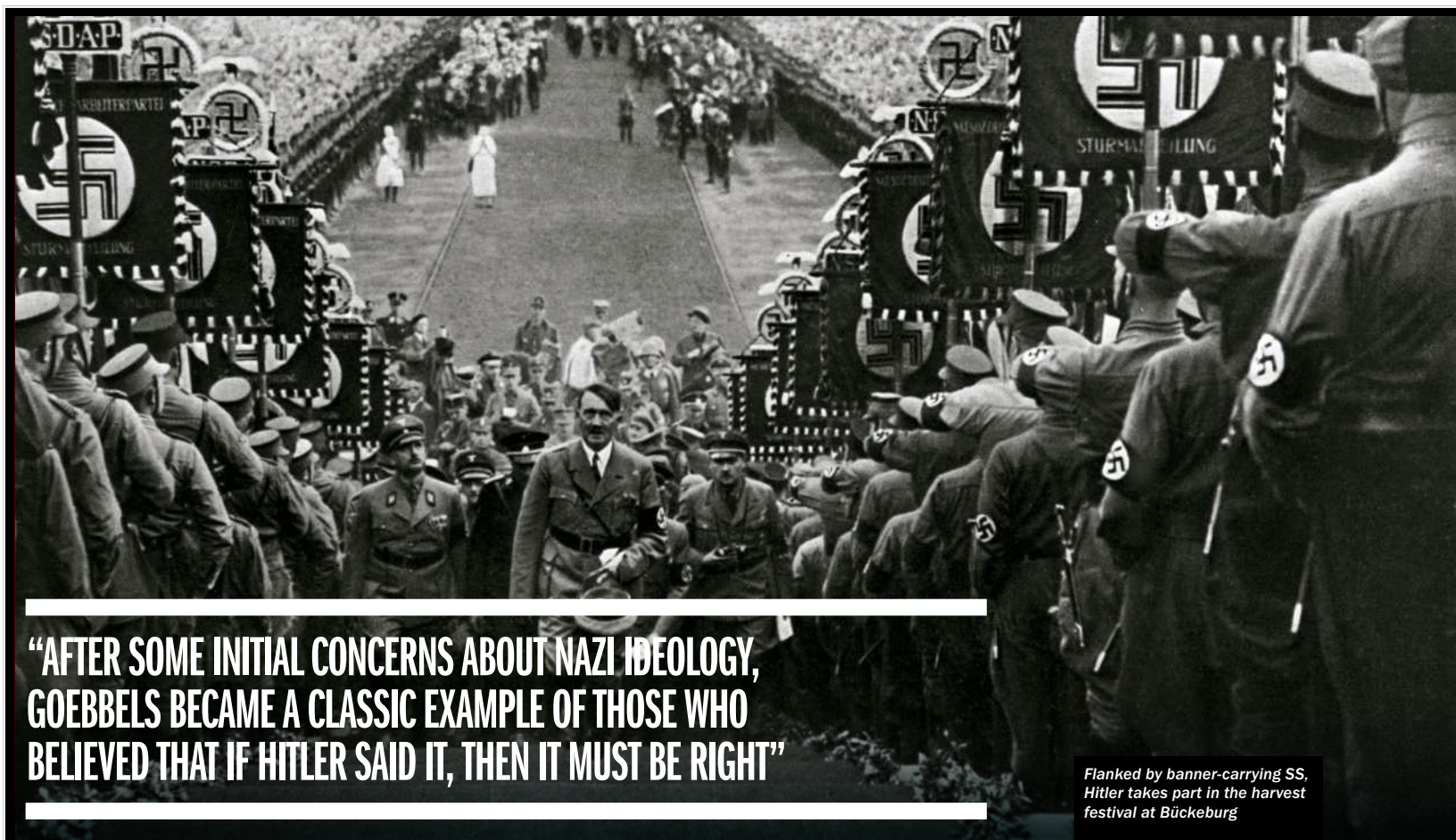
A question of loyalty

Gaining the co-operation of the army, Hitler purges the SA during the Night of the Long Knives. German soldiers are later required to swear an oath of loyalty to Hitler.



Hitler poses with SA troops in 1928





“AFTER SOME INITIAL CONCERNS ABOUT NAZI IDEOLOGY, GOEBBELS BECAME A CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF THOSE WHO BELIEVED THAT IF HITLER SAID IT, THEN IT MUST BE RIGHT”

Flanked by banner-carrying SS, Hitler takes part in the harvest festival at Bückeburg

them, at least the results will be guaranteed by their own Constitution.”

Hitler's faithful followers

During this period, Hitler had also begun to surround himself with the men who would be crucial to the development of the Nazi movement and within the Nazi government. Joseph Goebbels, who would be devoted to Hitler right through to the suicidal days inside the Führerbunker in 1945, was an intellectual radical who had a doctorate in German literature. After some initial concerns about Nazi ideology, Goebbels became a classic example of those who believed that if Hitler said it, then it must

be right. Hitler, therefore, became a sort of religious figure in whom his followers had faith.

Emotional devotion was valued over rationality and reason, and this tendency characterised Hitler's entire rule. In 1927, Hitler said: “[We] put faith in the first place and not cognition. One has to believe in a cause. Only faith creates a state. What motivates people to go and do battle for religious ideas? Not cognition but blind faith.”

This was certainly a characteristic seen in Goebbels, for upon reading *Mein Kampf*, he declared: “I love him... such a sparkling mind can be my leader. I bow to the greater one, the political genius... Adolf Hitler, I love you because you are great and simple at the same time. What one calls a genius.”

Similar attitudes of blind devotion were expressed by Rudolf Hess, who had joined the Nazi Party in 1920 after already having spent time in Germany's right-wing movement, and Hermann Göring, the World War I flying ace who joined the Nazi Party in 1922. He later became one of the most important men in the Third Reich, initially heading the SA (Stormtroopers), then founding the Gestapo (the Nazi secret police) and heading the Luftwaffe (air force).

Ernst Röhm represented a different type of Nazi. Like Hess and Göring, he had been an early supporter of the movement. He joined the Nazi Party in 1919 and played a key role in the Beer Hall Putsch. He held an important position

in the leadership and the establishment of the SA but he saw the journey of the Nazi Party very much as a revolution, even beyond the Putsch, when Hitler had decided to gain power through the political mainstream. To this end, Röhm said, “...since I am an immature and wicked man, war and unrest appeal to me more than good bourgeois order. Brutality is respected, the people need wholesome fear.” While he was one of Hitler's closest friends in the early days of the Nazi movement, he did not see Hitler as a divine leader to whom he had to submit himself. He wanted to pursue his own objectives and power within the party and it was this lack of obedience that ultimately led to his demise in 1934. Gregor Strasser, who, with his brother Otto, wanted to emphasise the socialist element of National Socialism above all else, similarly tried to strike his own path within the movement and lost out.

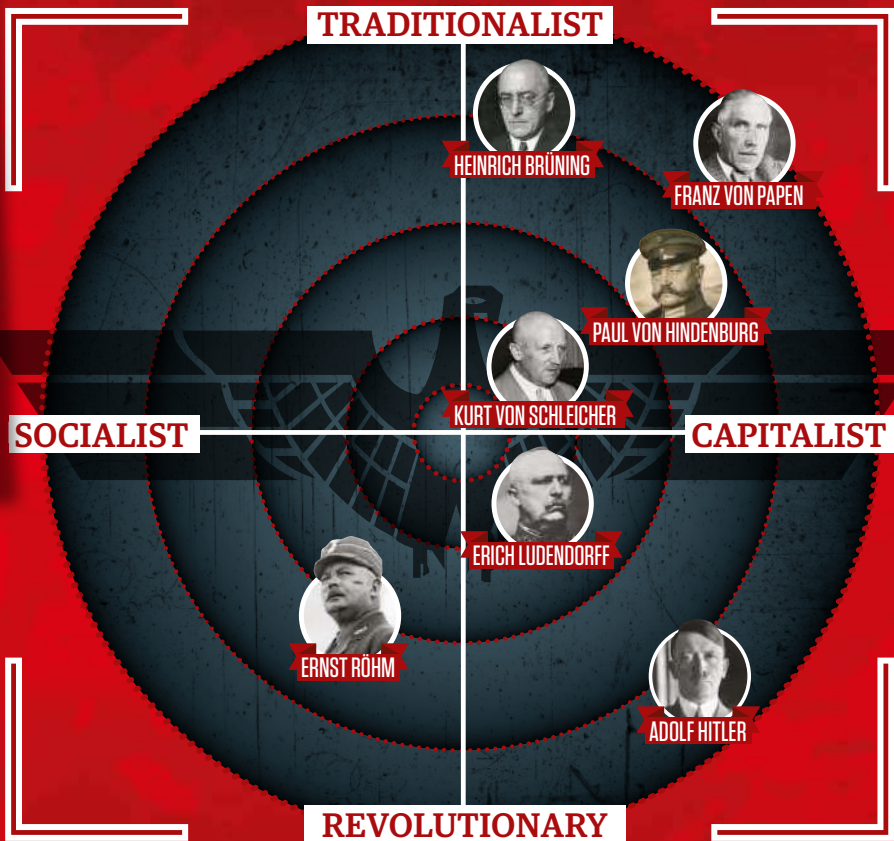
Economic crisis

While the profound distress caused by the loss of World War I and the social and economic chaos that followed had inspired a number of Germans to give the Nazi Party a hearing, by the mid 1920s conditions had improved and most people had turned away from the extreme fringes of politics. By the late 1920s, however, the instability and turmoil needed by the Nazi Party to present themselves as a viable alternative government had returned.



AXIS OF THE WEIMAR RIGHT

THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT'S KEY PLAYERS HAD DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO HEALING THE NATION



Adolf Hitler addresses massed ranks of soldiers at a Nazi rally held in Dortmund, c.1933

In 1928, food prices on the world market were beginning to drop and German agricultural workers were suffering. Germany's recovery from the disastrous hyperinflation of 1923, itself brought on by Germany's attempts to pay French and British war reparations imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, had been based upon loans from the United States. As the world economy began a downturn, so Germany's already fragile economy was threatened. When the financial markets of Wall Street crashed in 1929, heralding the beginning of the Great Depression, the USA called in its loans and the German economy, like so many economies around the world, went into a major downturn.

The mainstream parties in Germany seemed to offer little hope or constructive help to the general populace as major banks folded and unemployment spiralled out of control. By the end of 1929, about 1.5 million Germans were out of work. Within a year this figure had more than doubled. By early 1933, unemployment in Germany had reached a staggering 6 million. Governmental response had been to cut expenditure, wages and unemployment benefits – a disastrous move. As well as affecting the

ADOLF HITLER

Leader of the Nazi Party since the 1920s, Hitler believed in the totalitarian state, pre-eminent in every way above the individual. Pragmatic in his politics, he was compelled to work together with German industrialists and financiers to consolidate power. However, he loathed capitalism, and promoted the state control of economic and social institutions.

HEINRICH BRÜNING

As chancellor of Weimar Germany from March 1930 to May 1932, Brüning's negotiations with the Nazis failed to produce a coalition government. In his memoirs he claimed to have advocated the restoration of the Hohenzollern monarchy to prevent Hitler from taking control if Hindenburg died in office.

PAUL VON HINDENBURG

The hero of World War I, elderly Hindenburg served two terms as the

president of Germany. Considered the conservative choice, Hindenburg became embroiled in the country's post-war political upheaval. In 1933, he signed the Enabling Act, vesting near-dictatorial power in Hitler and becoming complicit in the rise of the Nazi Party.

ERNST RÖHM

A radical socialist, Röhm led the Sturmabteilung, or SA. His ruffians brawled with anti-Nazi factions in the streets. As the SA grew to outnumber the German Army, Hitler perceived it as a threat. Röhm was assassinated and the SA leadership purged during the Night of the Long Knives in 1934.

FRANZ VON PAPEN

A conservative and monarchist who served as chancellor of Weimar Germany in the Weimar Republic from June to November 1932, von Papen was largely responsible for convincing von Hindenburg to appoint Hitler chancellor of Germany in 1933, believing that a post in government would keep Hitler and

the Nazis under control. He was sadly mistaken.

KURT VON SCHLEICHER

The last chancellor of Weimar Germany, Schleicher was instrumental in rebuilding the German Army in contravention of the Treaty of Versailles. Politically moderate, he attempted to form a centrist coalition government, opposing burgeoning Nazi influence. This move earned Hitler's enmity, resulting in his assassination in 1934 during the Night of the Long Knives.

ERICH LUDENDORFF

An influential army general during World War I, a disillusioned Ludendorff became associated with right-wing political activism during the 1920s and participated in failed coup attempts in 1920 and 1923. Ludendorff served as a National Socialist member of the Reichstag but later warned of the dangers posed by a Nazi government.

working class, the economic pain spread to the middle class, too. People looked desperately for answers, assistance and hope. The extreme parties seemed to provide answers for extreme times, and the communists and Nazis fought it out on the streets for supremacy.

Hitler was in his element. Nazi Party membership rose from 120,000 in 1929 to over 1 million by 1930. In the frequent elections brought about by ongoing instability, the Nazis rose from 2.5 per cent of the vote in 1928 to over 18 per cent in 1930. By 1932, the Nazi Party polled almost 40 per cent of the vote. Hitler's message was for unity for 'true' Germans. He called for a return to the comradeship of the war years. Jutta Rüdiger, who would later lead the League of German Girls, recalled, "I was told that this frontline soldier (Hitler) had said... the only thing that matters is comradeship, the willingness to help and stand by one another."

Vote Hitler

In 1932, Hitler challenged the ageing World War I general Paul von Hindenburg for the German presidency. In the chaos of ineffectual government, revolving-door chancellors, economic pain and social upheaval, Hitler ran two impressive presidential campaigns due in large part to the work of his propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels. Hitler became the first politician to travel widely throughout the country by aircraft. Seeming to descend from the heavens as he travelled to as many as five cities a day to speak, the 'Hitler over Germany' campaign was an enormous success. Striking and effective election posters were put to good use. "Hitler – our last hope," read one. "Workers – the Brow, the Fist – vote for the Front Soldier Hitler!" read another, showing two burly working men gazing fiercely at the viewer. "German women, think of your children – vote Hitler," appealed another, as a fearful female figure clutched her children. One claimed, "Marxism is the guardian angel of Capitalism – vote National Socialist," with capitalism depicted as a smartly dressed, overweight Jewish man, holding a bag of money. These simple posters spoke to everyone – men, women,



Hitler strikes a pose for a photographer while rehearsing a speech. Hitler reviewed each pose to maximise the effect his words would have on the German people

Newly elected German chancellor Adolf Hitler being cheered by deputies during the first Reichstag session, 21 May 1933

the population at large – and they zeroed in on a common enemy: the Jew.

However, Germany's political elite was unconvinced that the working-class corporal, as they saw him, was the man for the job. With the country's social, political and economic chaos continuing to press in though, steps had to be taken. Believing they could control Hitler and the excesses of the Nazis if they were contained within government rather than agitating from outside, Hindenburg consented to Hitler becoming chancellor of Germany with Franz von Papen, a conservative, as vice-chancellor.

The error of their ways was swiftly realised. Less than a month after Hitler's appointment as German chancellor on 30 January 1933, Berlin's Reichstag building caught fire. A Dutch communist, Marinus van der Lubbe, was blamed but there were rumours of Nazi involvement. It was the final sign of total national emergency according to Hitler. The Enabling Act was passed on 24 March 1933. It allowed for the power to make laws without parliamentary passage through the Reichstag. Hitler proclaimed the Nazi Party was the only political party permitted in Germany. All other parties and trade unions

were disbanded. Individual German states lost any autonomous powers, and Nazi officials became state governors. Jews were declared 'non-Aryans' and as such were banned from teaching, the civil service, the military and owning businesses. The first concentration camp at Dachau, near Munich, was opened on 21 March 1933. Hitler was now effectively dictator of Germany, and the nation a totalitarian police state.

With his external enemies under control, Hitler turned his attention to the enemies within his own ranks. Hitler decided to act against Ernst Röhm, who had continued to agitate for a greater slice of power. He would not be subservient to the Führer and he believed the Stormtroopers should be merged with the German Army and fall under his command. Himmler and Göring concocted false evidence that Röhm was planning a coup. Hindenburg demanded that Hitler react. On 30 June 1934, Röhm and the SA leadership were executed along with anyone who Hitler felt had crossed him on his rise to power; Gregor Strasser was included on that list. Hitler's blood-soaked Third Reich had begun.





Hitler as a commanding presence during a Nazi rally, c.1933

“HITLER’S MESSAGE WAS FOR UNITY FOR ‘TRUE’ GERMANS. HE CALLED FOR A RETURN TO THE COMRADESHIP OF THE WAR YEARS”



A caricature of Hitler after the Night of the Long Knives showing his shooting abilities on both sides, featured in the Evening Standard, 1934

INSIDE THE NAZI TERROR STATE

HITLER SOUGHT TO CONTROL EVERY ASPECT OF GERMAN LIFE TO MAINTAIN HIS GRIP ON POWER

PERSUASIVE PROPAGANDA



The Nazis utilised a systematic campaign to promote their ideology and persecute perceived enemies of the German people. Propaganda effectively engendered loyalty to the Nazi state, embodied by Hitler. “One Reich, one people, one Führer!”

CONSOLIDATION OF GOVERNMENT



As chancellor, Hitler abolished the office of president and declared himself Führer. He effectively assumed the role of dictator as he suspended personal liberties, eliminated enemies and silenced opposition.

RELIGIOUS REDIRECTION



Realising religion was significant in the lives of many Germans, the Nazis were careful not to risk open hostility against the mainstream church. However, they utilised nationalism and the figure of Hitler as ‘saviour’ to conjure ‘religious’ fervour.

RESOLUTE YOUTH



Young people belonged to greater Germany. The Führer once told a gathering of Hitler Youth that they were Germany’s future, required to be “hard as Krupp steel.” From classrooms and into the fabric of family, the state held sway.

REIGN OF TERROR



A pillar of Nazi rule, terror gripped Germany. Threats of imprisonment, torture, or death were real for those who dared to dissent. The Nazi secret police, or Gestapo, seemed to be everywhere.

THE WORKING MASSES



The Nazis abolished trade unions, absorbing their memberships into the Reich Labour Front. They also capitalised on mass unemployment to generate work projects to create the illusion of long-term prosperity.

COERCIVE CULTURE



Art, literature, music, or any form of expression deemed subversive was consigned to the flaming pyre. Every aspect of German culture, science and social interaction, reflected the Nazi world view.

WORLD WAR II

Hitler's World War II campaign would get off to a flying start. However, a number of costly mistakes and delays would ultimately prove decisive

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Hitler's leadership style and its impact on WWII

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The Nazi war machine brings Europe to its knees

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Hitler gets his first taste of military defeat

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What was life like under the Führer's 'Desert Fox'?



"BY 1945 HITLER WAS ALL BUT DICTATING TO HIS GENERALS EXACTLY WHAT TO DO, AND HE HAD LITTLE TRUST LEFT IN ANY OF THEM"

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Mussolini forces Hitler into a costly intervention

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Hitler meets his match on the Eastern Front

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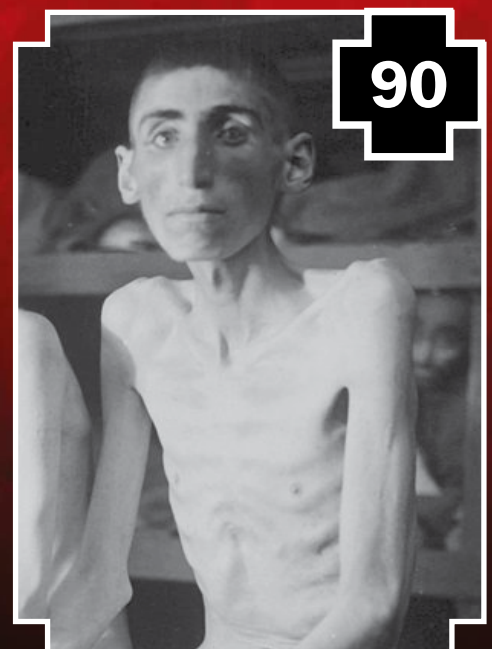
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90

HITLER AT WAR

To what extent did the Führer's military leadership style affect key moments of World War II? We get expert Dr Geoffrey Megargee's verdict on Adolf Hitler's tactical prowess

Since the fall of the Third Reich in 1945, our verdict on Hitler's leadership has mostly come from the pens and mouths of his generals. Many of these men had grown to resent their former leader, and with the fall of Germany they seized the opportunity to criticise and embarrass the Führer at every opportunity. But beneath the façade of slander and betrayal, was Hitler's military leadership style truly so unpopular – and to what extent did his decisions determine the outcome of World War II?

"So much of what we thought we knew about Hitler for many years came from his generals, and they have a lot of reasons to either consciously or unconsciously falsify what happened," says Dr Geoffrey Megargee. "They more or less accused him of starting the war against their advice and then of losing it through his meddling, but that doesn't really give us an accurate picture."

When Germany declared war on Poland on 1 September 1939, Hitler had not expected to encounter such fierce opposition from Britain and France. After both countries declared war on the Third Reich in response, the German population were distraught; World War I was still fresh in the nation's memory, and the country had only just started to thrive again following the harsh penalties imposed on them after their defeat in 1918 and later the Great Depression of the 1930s. Now the leader of the Nazi Party was dragging them into another war against familiar adversaries. Despite his popularity, Hitler was not immune to

criticism and the start of World War II saw a significant drop in morale in Germany.

But that all changed when France fell in just a matter of weeks to Germany's blitzkrieg tactics. According to Dr Megargee, "Once France was knocked out of the war, I suspect at that point Hitler probably reached about the high point of his popularity with the German population because Germany had just managed to defeat in a matter of weeks this enemy that had defeated them over four years of combat in World War I. That was quite a coup."

Riding on this success, Hitler quickly involved himself in all aspects of the operations of the German Army – much more so than the respective leaders of other countries. He was known for an attention to detail that was interfering at best, and detrimental at worst. "Hitler was in charge of strategy from the start, figuring out against whom Germany was going to fight, and his decisions were not nearly so unpopular as [his generals] tried to say later on."

"They were all in favour of starting a war against Poland, they were all in favour of starting a war against the Soviet Union – these were not unpopular decisions on Hitler's part."

"But when we get down to the next level of warfare – operations, ie planning and conducting campaigns – here Hitler was on weaker ground. He had some good insights, and some of his decisions turned out well, but he didn't have any systematic training in this kind of warfare and that showed." ►





The popular picture of Hitler is of a man that heeded no advice – a leader that would rather listen to his own gut instinct than to the rational arguments of his generals. This was true to an extent; Hitler was distrustful of some of his senior officers, who in turn criticised him for his inexperience in warfare, and he certainly grew more distrustful and erratic as the war went on.

That being said it was largely the officers themselves that have swayed our view of Hitler's leadership, as they resented his involvement in their military, as Dr Megargee points out. "General [Franz] Halder, for example – who was chief of the general staff from October 1938 to September 1942 – maintained a sort of passive-aggressive relationship with Hitler. He would agree openly with what Hitler had to say, but would then try to work around the decisions that Hitler made." However, for the first few years of the war at least, Hitler relied upon his generals greatly

and would seek their advice on both strategy and tactics, albeit some more so than others.

The Führer, though, was not blithely ignorant; he was well aware of the hatred some of his officers felt towards him, and he used this to his advantage at every available opportunity. "He tended to play off commanders against each other. They would throw in their opinions at briefings and he would go with whoever he agreed with, so it was sort of a divide-and-conquer kind of approach to leadership. And once he made up his mind on something he could be extremely stubborn about it."

As mentioned the Führer had an uncanny attention to detail and thus involved himself in the smallest of minutiae about particular units, and many of his generals would be caught short if they could not supply him with precise information – such as, for instance, the number of tanks in a particular division. By 1943 Hitler had started bringing two stenographers (court recorders) to each of his meetings, and

although many records were burned at the end of the war, those that survived reveal Hitler's meetings to be intricate to the point that they were discussing the movements of very small units on the front and their equipment.

Hitler's level of involvement was beginning to pose a problem. "You could argue that Hitler was too detailed," says Dr Megargee. "When you start talking about how many trucks a particular unit has at its disposal, that's just ridiculous for a head of state to try to interpret as a military commander. There's no way that he can understand the situation well enough to an extent that it's going to make a positive difference on the battlefield." Such was the extent of his incessant attention to detail that by the end of the war almost no major unit was allowed to move without Hitler's express permission – especially one on the retreat.

Aside from Hitler's over-reliance on details, as the war dragged on he began to rely more and more upon his instincts, and "there were ►

THE INVASION OF POLAND

1-27 SEPTEMBER 1939

On 1 September 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland, and just two days later both Britain and France declared war on Germany. World War II had begun. The campaign in Poland was devised by General Franz Halder, chief of the general staff, but it was ultimately Hitler who gave the order to invade. Germany employed blitzkrieg (which translates as 'lightning war') tactics, denting Poland's front lines with Panzer tanks and aircraft before troops moved through gaps this created. The approach was hugely successful, although it was not one that Hitler came up with. On 27 September 1939 Poland surrendered, albeit with a Soviet invasion from the east dividing the country. The effects of this campaign were felt across the globe and signalled the start of World War II. Hitler would go on to employ the same tactics in other countries, including France in 1940.

The expert's view

"If Germany was going to have a war, then September 1939 was probably the best time to attack," says Dr Megargee. "The Allies were getting stronger, so the timing was working against Germany at that point and I think Hitler even said that. But, of course, he was counting on Britain and France to stay out of it. He figured they would let Poland go; he underestimated them on that point."

Verdict: Success

"The whole idea of starting the war was a poor strategic decision, but if Hitler was going to start one this was probably the best he could do"



General Franz Halder (left) with General Von Brauchitsch



Hitler watches on as German troops march towards Poland

“WHEN YOU START TALKING ABOUT HOW MANY TRUCKS A PARTICULAR UNIT HAS AT ITS DISPOSAL, THAT’S JUST RIDICULOUS FOR A HEAD OF STATE TO TRY TO INTERPRET”



General Halder (at Hitler's left) discussing plans with others over a large map

THE FALL OF FRANCE

10 MAY – 22 JUNE 1940

Resigned to the fact that both Britain and France had declared war, Hitler knew that he needed to nullify France to have any chance of fending off the Allies. So, on 10 May 1940, Germany invaded its Gallic neighbour. The campaign consisted of two operations. The first was Case Yellow (Fall Gelb), where German forces advanced into the Ardennes region and pushed the Allied forces in Belgium back to the sea. This ultimately resulted in the mass evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk between 26 May and 4 June. A second operation known as Case Red (Fall Rot) began on 5 June, with Germany's air superiority and armoured units overcoming the depleted French forces. German forces pushed into Paris on 14 June, and by 22 June they had signed an armistice with the French that would see Germany occupy the north and west of the country until 1944. The two major operations were not Hitler's doing. However, it was Hitler that ultimately convinced the German High Command to accept the plan, which was a significant factor in defeating France. The campaign prevented the stalemate that had occurred in World War I, and enabled Germany to begin focusing its attention on other foes.

The expert's view

“Hitler – especially at this stage of the war – was extremely nervous

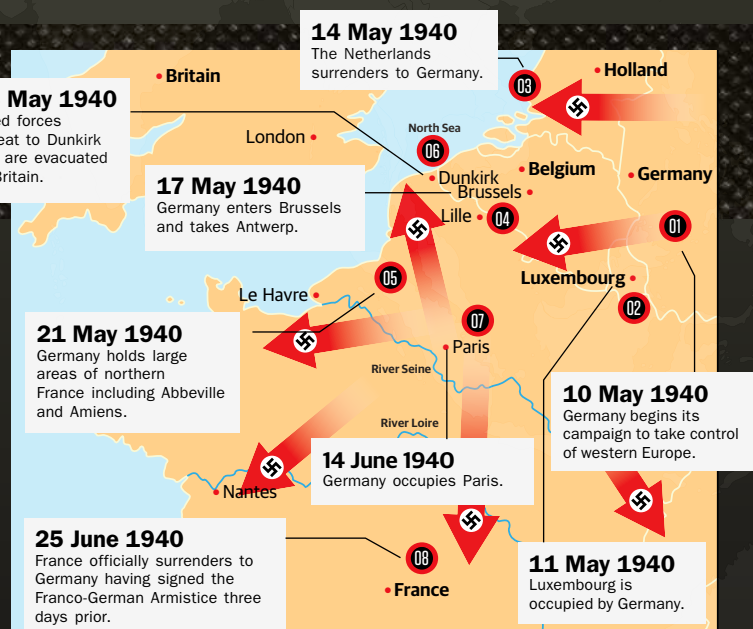
about how it was going to all work out. He was very worried about the left flank of that attack going through the Ardennes to the coast of the English Channel, and he was worried that the French might counterattack. He was [pivotal] in getting the German High Command to accept [Erich von] Manstein's plan to go through the Ardennes.”

Verdict: Success

“Hitler had a good instinct to go with what Manstein proposed. Hitler was on the right side of that decision”

Who was Erich von Manstein?

Born in Berlin on 24 November 1887, and after seeing service during World War I, Manstein was the chief of staff to Germany's Army Group South at the start of World War II. He was one of the main instigators of an offensive through the Ardennes (known as Case Yellow or Fall Gelb) during the invasion of France in 1940, which ensured Germany a swift victory in Europe. He later attained the rank of general, but his constant criticism of Hitler's strategies coupled with his failure to turn the tide at the Battle of Stalingrad in 1942 saw him ousted from the German Army in March 1944. He was captured and imprisoned by the British in August 1945, and died almost 30 years later on 9 June 1973.



Hitler in Paris following the fall of France

times that served him well, but a lot of times that didn't," Dr Megargee continues. "By [1944] he was sort of living in a fantasy land, frankly; he thought he was going to burst through the Allied lines and separate the British from the Americans and the whole Allied Western coalition would fall apart and he could go back to fighting the Russians [in the east]. By then his instinct had become delusional." At this point in the war Hitler's generals were doing their best to convince him to employ different tactics, such as initiating smaller offensives instead of large ones, but Hitler was having none of it.

For all his shortcomings, though, Hitler did at times make some smart decisions, but embarking on a war at all was a poor one. "The whole war was badly conceived to begin with," says Dr Megargee. "The idea that Germany could take on the British Empire, the Soviet Union and then the US at the same time was at the very least problematic. I've had people ask me when do I consider the war to have been lost, and I semi-jokingly say, '1 September 1939'."

With the hand Hitler had been dealt – or rather the hand he had dealt himself – he managed to conduct himself, and the army, in a reasonable manner at the start of the conflict. The invasion of Poland was arguably ►

THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

3 SEPTEMBER 1939 – 8 MAY 1945

For all his inexperience in ground warfare, Hitler was even more of a novice when it came to the sea. He didn't have any considerable knowledge of navies, and thus for the most part he left naval operations in the hands of generals he trusted including Erich Raeder and Karl Dönitz, who both served as commander-in-chief of the Kriegsmarine during the war.

The Battle of the Atlantic was the longest military campaign of World War II, running continuously from the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939 to 8 May 1945. The majority of the campaign was fought between the Kriegsmarine and the combined Allied navies of Britain and Canada, and later in 1941 the United

States. The Germans relied considerably on their U-boat submarines, with only a handful of warships available.

The campaign revolved largely around the Allied blockade of Germany and a subsequent counter-blockade by the Kriegsmarine. German U-boats attempted to attack convoy ships travelling across the Atlantic, but the strength of the Allied navies, combined with Hitler's decision to pull many U-boats away for other campaigns, would see the Allies gain control of the Atlantic and the Channel by 1944.

The expert's view

"Hitler was involved in some key decisions, especially to take U-boats away from the Atlantic and send them to Norway and the Mediterranean. One probably can't argue that those decisions weakened the Atlantic campaign fatally, but they certainly didn't help it."

Verdict: Failure

"Hitler's on-again, off-again decisions regarding resources for the construction of U-boats did hurt the [campaign] considerably"



The British Royal Navy battleship HMS Barham explodes as her 38cm (15in) magazine ignites



Officers on a destroyer, escorting a large convoy of ships, keep a lookout for enemy submarines in 1941

KEY MOMENTS IN WORLD WAR II

1939

Outbreak of WWII

Hitler invades Poland and, two days later, Britain and France declare war on Germany, heralding the start of World War II.

1 September 1939

Atlantic warfare

For almost six years the longest military campaign of WWII sees the Allied and Axis powers fight for control of the Atlantic.

3 September 1939

Blitzkrieg strikes

Germany takes control of large portions of western Europe, including Belgium, culminating in the surrender of France.

25 June 1940

Luftwaffe air raids

The German Luftwaffe begins an air campaign against the UK, but the Royal Air Force (RAF) stands strong and is victorious almost four months later.

10 July 1940

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

10 JULY - 31 OCTOBER 1940

With France defeated with surprising swiftness, Hitler was unsure what to do next. The German High Command had been especially unconvinced that France would fall in such a short amount of time, and thus they set about deciding what Germany's next course of action should be.

Hitler was all too aware that Britain posed a significant threat and, with little chance of a diplomatic resolution, he would have to attack. The prospects of a potential invasion of Britain (known as Operation Sea Lion), however, were incredibly slim. The Royal Navy was far superior to the German Navy (Kriegsmarine), while the Royal Air Force posed a formidable threat in the skies. If an invasion were to happen, the German army wanted to get as many troops ashore as possible, while the Kriegsmarine was adamant that such an operation would be impossible.

With numerous options available, Hitler eventually opted to test out the defensive capabilities of Britain with an attack from the air. If the German Luftwaffe could manage to gain air superiority over the Royal Air Force, it could then keep the British Royal Navy at bay while Germany mounted an all-out ground invasion.

Britain, however, proved a much more stubborn opponent than Germany had ever anticipated, and ultimately the RAF was never in too much danger of succumbing to defeat. One of the key factors that affected the outcome was the decision for the Luftwaffe to switch from bombing British military targets and airfields to bombing cities such as London as a terror tactic.

With the Luftwaffe unable to gain air superiority, Hitler postponed Operation Sea Lion indefinitely in October 1940. However, the bombing of civilian Britain continued in what was to become known as the Blitz.

The expert's view

"The popular image is that the RAF was sort of on the ropes when the Germans made the switch [from bombing

"THE BATTLE OF FRANCE IS OVER. THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN IS ABOUT TO BEGIN"

WINSTON CHURCHILL, 18 JUNE 1940

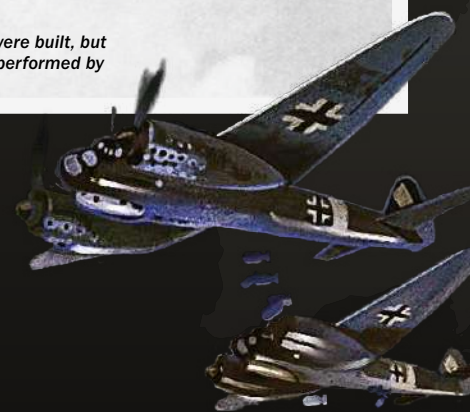


About 6,000 Heinkel He 111s were built, but for the most part they were outperformed by British Hurricanes and Spitfires

airfields to cities], and that in effect took the pressure off [Britain]. On the other hand, while the RAF was having a hard time all they really had to do was withdraw a little farther back into the country and husband their resources and they still could have stopped an invasion quite effectively. I don't get the impression the Luftwaffe ever really had a good chance of knocking out the RAF."

Verdict: Failure

"Hitler may have been involved in the decision to go from attacking British airfields and radar stations to bombing London, but this certainly did not help the campaign"



1945

USSR invasion

Germany invades the Soviet Union, reneging on the Non-Aggression Pact that the two countries had signed in 1939.

22 June 1941

Pearl Harbor attack

Japanese fighter planes attack the American base at Pearl Harbor, killing over 2,000 people. Four days later, the USA enters the war.

7 December 1941

D-Day landings

An Allied campaign of over 300,000 soldiers begins landings in Normandy in northern France in order to break Germany's stranglehold on Europe.

6 June 1944

Hitler dies

Hitler commits suicide in his Führerbunker as Germany faces defeat in the Battle of Berlin with the Soviet Union. Germany surrenders eight days later.

1 May 1945

Nuclear attack

The US drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, killing tens of thousands in an instant. On 2 September Japan surrenders and WWII ends.

6 and 9 August 1945

THE INVASION OF THE USSR

22 JUNE 1941 – 24 JULY 1944

The height of Hitler's involvement with his army came in 1941 when he decided to invade the USSR. Germany's battle with the Red Army began with the five-month-long Operation Barbarossa on 22 June 1941, and culminated in the Soviets liberating Minsk (Belarus) and Majdanek (Poland) in July 1944.

Hitler and his generals believed that the Soviet Union would fall if Germany mounted a sustained attack. They presumed, somewhat naively, that the Red Army would collapse and the Soviet people would surrender after a short military campaign, allowing Germany to occupy large portions of the USSR while focusing their efforts on Britain in the west. This, of course, was anything but what really happened, and Hitler's underestimation of the Soviet Union was a major failing of the entire campaign.

Hitler held a great number of debates in Barbarossa itself regarding the direction of the main attack: whether it should go to Moscow or into the Ukraine and up through Leningrad. Hitler ultimately made the choice to focus on the economic resources of the Soviet Union rather than the capital. Hitler had good instincts in this regard, but the overall decision to attack the Soviet Union was a poor one.

The Soviets refused to 'roll over' the way the Germans had expected them to, and while Hitler's direction of the campaign in the summer of 1941 was adequate, his refusal to heed the advice of his generals as the invasion dragged on was a major flaw on his part.

Germany's blitzkrieg tactics that had been so successful earlier in the war were nullified by the Red Army's tactic of holding back before launching counteroffensives. In December 1941 Germany was at the gates of Moscow, but the Soviets kept attacking and wore the Germans down. With winter approaching, many of Hitler's generals suggested the German Army should retreat and consolidate before attacking again in spring 1942. Hitler, though, was adamant the army should hold everywhere to ensure they didn't lose any of their heavy equipment, which he came under much criticism for. His decision was arguably the right one at first, but later in the war he became too enamoured with the technique.

With their first attempt at defeating the Soviet Union unsuccessful, Germany would try again before the war was out. Hitler and his generals were convinced the Red Army was on the ropes, and sustained attacks would wear them out. But the Russians stood strong and, after successfully defending key cities

including Moscow in 1942, Hitler was left with few options but retreat.

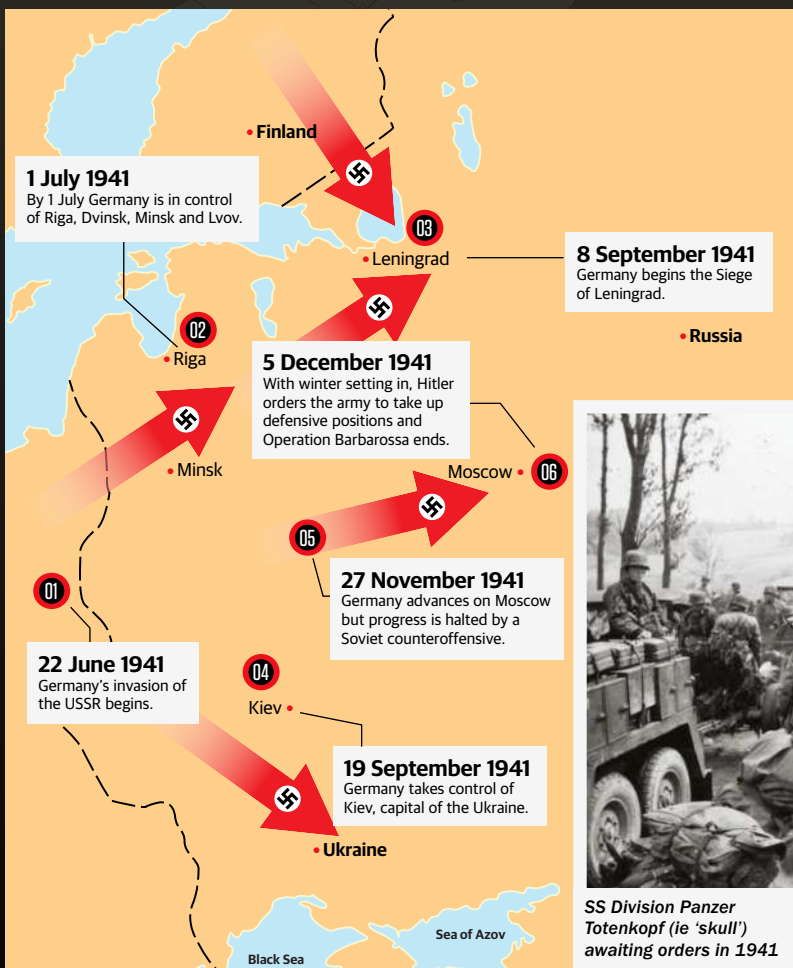
The expert's view

"The genocide of the Jews and the general abuse and destruction of the Soviet population made it impossible to come to any kind of arrangement with the Soviet people. There's an argument to be made that if the Germans had gone in with a different attitude they could have [tempted] Ukraine and the Baltic states, and perhaps other portions of the Soviet Union, away. But Hitler assumed they were going to have a quick military victory and saw no reason to compromise. He convinced himself that the Red Army must be on the ropes, and they kept pushing in the winter, still trying to take Moscow and still trying to advance in the south, and they ran out of steam. As a result, Germany found itself in the middle of winter without the proper equipment, with no place to go, and vulnerable to the Soviet counteroffensive."

Verdict: Failure



"If you ignore the bad decision of attacking the USSR to begin with, on an operational level Hitler did fairly well [at first, but he lost his way]"



SS Division Panzer Totenkopf (ie 'skull') awaiting orders in 1941





German troops moving into Russian territory in armoured vehicles in June 1941



A soldier defending the German line with an MG 34 machine gun



To start with Germany made good progress into Russia, but the tide began to turn as winter set in



Hitler poses with his senior officers and generals in June 1940

“BY 1945 HITLER WAS ALL BUT DICTATING TO HIS GENERALS EXACTLY WHAT TO DO, AND HE HAD LITTLE TRUST LEFT IN ANY OF THEM”

his only course of action once the wheels of war had been set in motion, and the manner in which Germany conquered not only Poland but other nations, such as France, was remarkable; they had swiftly and effectively seized a large chunk of Europe thanks to Hitler's belief that France could be beaten.

What he didn't count on, however, was the steadfast refusal of Britain to enter into any sort of diplomatic negotiations. “With Britain not giving up, his options were becoming extremely limited,” says Dr Megargee. “He was in an economic bind; he was not going to be able to continue this war over the long run against the British, because, sooner or later, Germany was going to run out of strength for that – even with the tentative support of the Soviet Union.

“So he made the decision for strategic and economic and ideological reasons to attack the Soviet Union – something he was more or less intending to do all along anyway. That decision was based on the assumption – which his generals shared and backed – that the USSR would collapse – that there would be one short military campaign which would destroy the Red Army. Obviously that didn't work out very well.”

Indeed, the war came to a point in 1941 where defeat for Germany seemed all but inevitable and Hitler's strategic choices became ever-more limited. By 1942, after a second attempt at defeating the Soviet Union had failed, Dr Megargee suggests that, for

Hitler, it became “just a matter of holding out as best he could in the hope that the Allied coalition would break up. And it became more based on delusion than anything else.”

By 1945 Hitler was all but dictating to his generals exactly what to do, and he had little trust left in any of them. But by then, and possibly even much earlier, for all the strategic knowledge in the world, Hitler had no hope of leading the Third Reich to victory.

“I think quite honestly his biggest strategic mistake was starting the war. Beyond that you get into details, and there are arguments to be made for each of the strategic decisions he made after that – declaring war on the Soviet Union and the United States, for example – but that's all within the context of a war in which Germany was, I won't say fated to lose, but certainly was not going to win easily.”

Hitler's deterioration from sanity to irrationality, therefore, was not the deciding factor in the war, however there can be little doubt that his leadership style did little to help what was already a difficult cause for Germany. Perhaps even with the greatest generals in the world the Third Reich would have been defeated; of that we cannot be certain. What we do know, however, was that Hitler was not the great military leader he himself thought he was. For his handful of victories there was a truckload of defeats, and his refusal to listen to reason ultimately accelerated Nazi Germany down the path to defeat.





**MOMENT
IN TIME**

Hitler and Mussolini drive through Munich in June 1940. This photo was found in Eva Braun's personal albums, although it is unknown whether she took the photo or not

BLITZKRIEG:

HITLER'S LIGHTNING WAR

There are few instances in modern warfare where two equally matched powers fought such a one-sided contest. The Battle for France was over in weeks...

The blitzkrieg, or 'lightning war', is a German term that was coined by Western media to characterise the rapidity and proficiency of Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939. That conflict, which pitted the burgeoning military prowess of a resurgent Germany against the numerically deficient and under-gunned Polish, was no contest. Hitler, however, hoped that this

show of strength might persuade Britain and France to recognise his occupation.

They did not, and by early October he had already promulgated Fall Gelb, or 'Case Yellow', an attack on the west that would push through Luxembourg, Belgium and Holland, damaging the armies of the French and her allies and establishing a base for an assault by air and sea on Britain, before pushing for the conquest of France.

At this stage, while Hitler had a firm idea of what he had hoped the 'Yellow' could achieve, he did not have a clear concept for its technical specificity. Like the previous heads of state in Germany, and in Prussia beforehand, Hitler delegated the intricacies to his military chiefs, a decision that invited procrastination and delay, with the man initially charged with the plan's formulation, General Halder, failing to acquiesce to



German troops moved through the forests of the Ardennes, catching the Allies by surprise

**“LIKE THE PREVIOUS HEADS
OF STATE IN GERMANY, AND IN
PRUSSIA BEFOREHAND, HITLER
DELEGATED THE INTRICACIES
TO HIS MILITARY CHIEFS,
A DECISION THAT INVITED
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Hitler's various demands for a quick and decisive victory.

With Hitler at this stage enjoying only limited support among the military high command, the plan of attack underwent a number of revisions, the generals (quite rightly) insisting that autumn and then winter were not the seasons for a full-scale invasion. It was down to one of Hitler's few allies to jog his plan forward.

This was General von Manstein, the chief of staff for Army Group A, whose idea was to stake everything on a surprise attack by a heavily mechanised force through the Ardennes, hammering against the weakest section of the French defence, north of the sprawling fortresses of the Maginot Line. This would be a second blitzkrieg, offering an even greater prize than that unleashed against the Poles.

The penetrative striking role was to fall on Army Group A, comprising seven of the ten available German panzer divisions. They would push through to the River Meuse and then either sweep south of the Maginot, or along the Somme valley towards the Channel coast. Army Group B, meanwhile, comprising three panzer divisions, was to draw the Allied forces into Belgium and hold them there so that they could not move against Army Group A's unprotected right flank. Army Group C, with no panzer

divisions, would engage the garrisons defending the Maginot so that they could not move against A's left flank.

The attack opened on 10 May and it began with a Luftwaffe assault. Around 500 twin-engined bombers took to the skies in the early morning, bound for 72 designated airfields in France, Belgium and Holland. Before first light, paratroopers were dropping into positions close to the Hague and Leyden. One of the most daring assaults came against the Belgian fortress of Eben-Emael, where troops used the element of surprise to land gliders on the roof, pinning the defenders inside and using concrete-piercing explosives to force entry.

The element of surprise was key and nowhere was it better employed than against the Dutch, a neutral country. Holland's tiny army had not fought a war for more than 100 years. Across the centuries the Lowlanders' best form of defence had been to retreat among the complex network of canals surrounding Amsterdam and from there engaging in a guerrilla-type war, but this strategy faltered in the modern age as Luftwaffe bombs tumbled from the skies. When the paratroopers of 22nd Airborne Division landed deep in the heart of Holland to await the arrival of Army Group B, the game was up. By 15 May the Dutch government had capitulated.

Belgium fared little better. She too had hoped to remain neutral and therefore would not allow Anglo-French forces to take up positions within her territory, though she had passed on details of an early incarnation of 'Yellow', which fell into her hands during January of 1940.

The attack unfolded as Hitler had hoped, Army Group B's assault on Belgium drawing the British and French forward and though they knew the Belgians, for all their tenacity, were withdrawing ahead of them, spirits remained high. The Allies believed this was the main enemy effort, and they were confident that their superior numbers would check the advance.

But it was through the supposedly impenetrable Ardennes that the main German thrust was coming as the heavily mechanised Army Group A rumbled forward. The largest concentration of tanks ever seen was more than 160 kilometres deep and it met little effective resistance as it pushed on to the River Meuse. Its main concerns were logistical – here were 86 divisions employing around 1,800 tanks – as Panzers and armoured vehicles, artillery and supply columns became ensnarled in traffic jams, and staffers fought frantically to co-ordinate movement orders.

And yet still the push continued. By the evening of 12 May the first armoured

The British Expeditionary Force fought bravely in the north but was no match for Germany's Army Group B



divisions had arrived at the Meuse in two positions and though bridges had been blown and the French resistance was stiff, the Germans powered on. By the end of the following day, four bridgeheads had been established, the Luftwaffe's heavy bombers and Stuka dive-bombers paralysing French artillery positions while anti-tank and anti-aircraft fire neutralised French defensive emplacements on the west bank.

Infantry and motorcycle regiments were the first to cross, and these pushed on a further 16 kilometres, to Chemery, while the highly effective General Heinz Guderian personally oversaw the construction of a pontoon bridge for his tanks. This was the ideal time for an Allied counterattack, targeting the congested bridgeheads and makeshift pontoon but only a token effort was launched and it soon fell back.

The Germans' strike through the Ardennes had allowed them to emerge at a junction between the French Second and Ninth Armies, which contained many poorly trained reserves. The French, unlike the Germans, had not used the 'Phoney War' over the preceding eight months to train up their reserves, and when on the evening of 14 May the Ninth elected to fall back to a new defensive position 16 kilometres further west, Guderian's bridgehead was some 48 kilometres wide and 24 kilometres deep.

14 May saw British and French bombers bid to destroy the vital pontoon bridge at Sedan but around half of the 170 heavy aircraft were shot down. 'Flak had its day of glory,' according to Guderian.

There was now a breach opening in the French defensive line – from Sedan in the south through to Dinant around 80 kilometres north – and the German's three vanguard panzer corps from Army Group A poured through, Guderian around Sedan and the wily Major-General Erwin Rommel through Dinant. The French Ninth Army's withdrawal, had allowed Lieutenant-General

Reinhardt to cross his tanks, in between the other two panzer corps, at Monthermé.

Rommel and Reinhardt then thrust onwards through 15 May, manoeuvring behind the panicked troops of the Ninth Army. The French Army's Indo-Chinese machine-gunners, who had put up a spirited defence of the river crossing, were bypassed (their tenacity portending what would unfold in Vietnam many years later) and their comrades from the Ninth were soon surrendering in droves.

Elsewhere, more seasoned French troops offered sterner resistance. Further north above Dinant, the First Army fought bravely, as it would do until it was eventually surrounded at Lille. The Ninth Army rallied with the appointment of General Henri Giraud, and Charles de Gaulle launched counterattacks with his 4th Armoured Division, though while these were courageous they were largely ineffectual.

As the German panzers broke through, Hitler and his chiefs of staff urged caution. General Halder, for example, wanted to line the rapidly advancing panzer corridor with the infantry battalions who were lagging far behind the main advance; the panzers had advanced 64 kilometres since their crossing of the Meuse.

On the ground, the dynamic commanders like Guderian and Rommel were itching to push onward to the Channel coast. All of the seven panzer divisions from Army Group A were across the Meuse and massing into an enormous iron fist, while before them they saw the Second and Ninth Armies simply disintegrate. They felt victory was well within their grasp, and indeed it was.

Elsewhere, the French garrisons to the south were imprisoned in the Maginot Line; with no effective transport they were completely unable to mobilise. In the north, meanwhile, the French First Army, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), and the remaining Belgian forces were gradually giving ground

The Panzer 35(t) with its 37mm cannon was co-opted from the Czech forces



THE OPPOSING FORCES

In terms of numbers and materials available during the Battle for France, the German and Anglo-French forces were evenly matched, certainly on the ground. The Germans had 136 divisions in the west, around a third of which were battle-hardened 'crack' troops. The French and British together had 104 divisions, along with 22 Belgian and 10 Dutch.

The Allies could call on around 3,000 tanks, the Germans around 2,500, though just shy of 1,500 of these were weaker Panzer I and Panzer II models. The most effective German armour was its 349 Panzer III and 278 Panzer IV models, along with about 330 Czech tanks that had been absorbed into the panzer regiments. The best Allied tanks were the French S-35 and the Char B1. The former, known as the Souma, was widely regarded among the best tanks in the world at the time. It was in the air that Germany dominated. The French aircraft totalled around 1,200 fighters and bombers with the RAF adding around 600 more. The Luftwaffe's air strength, meanwhile, comprised somewhere between 3,000-3,500 fighters, bombers and reconnaissance planes, and they worked in tandem with their ground forces. The Stuka dive-bomber, in particular, proved a vital strike weapon during the first few days of the campaign.

"THE FRENCH AIRCRAFT TOTALLED AROUND 1,200 FIGHTERS AND BOMBERS WITH THE RAF ADDING 600 MORE"

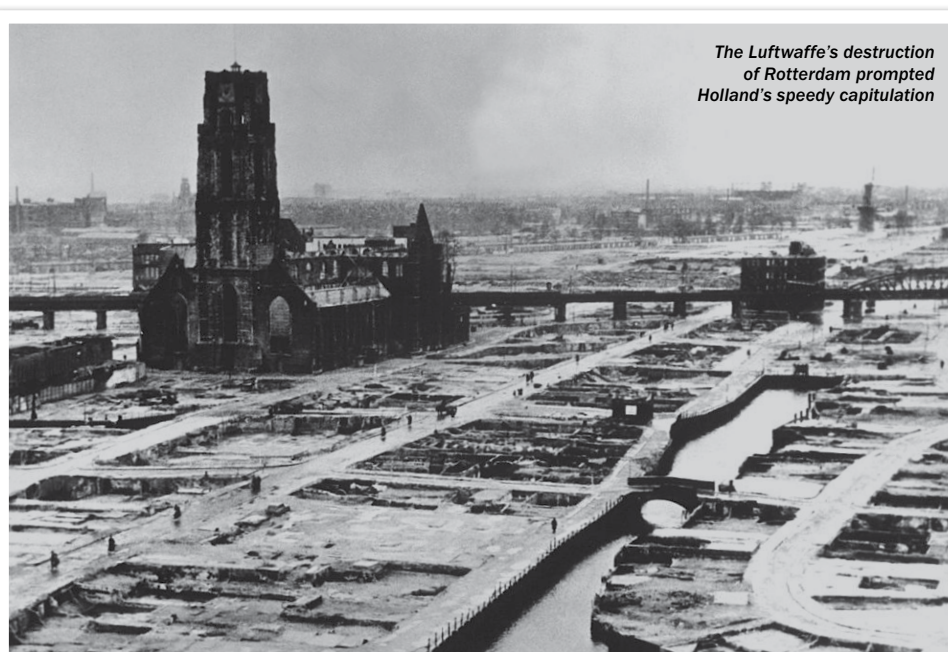
Below: The French S-35 tank, or Souma, boasted 40mm armour and a hefty 47mm turret-mounted cannon



to Army Group B. Nevertheless, Hitler's anxieties ultimately won through and the German advance was ordered to a complete halt on 17 May.

And yet, as Hitler and his high command argued, the panzers started up again and rolled further forward. By 19 May Guderian's divisions were just 80 kilometres from Abbeville at the mouth of the Somme; their arrival there would split the Allied forces in two. The Allies needed to counterattack before it was too late and the French Chief of General Staff, General Gamelin, ordered a combined counteroffensive from the Allied armies north and south of the Somme.

This was the way to deal with blitzkrieg – attack the panzer corridors' unprotected flanks – but his order came just as General Weygand replaced him on 19 May. Weygand cancelled the order while he assessed the situation. When he formulated a similar



GERMAN INVASION OF THE WEST

1. INVASION BEGINS

10 May

Army Group B moves in from the north, drawing Allies forward. Army Group A moves through the Ardennes while Army Group C engages the Maginot Line to the south.

2. DINANT & MONTHERMÉ

12-15 May

Erwin Rommel overwhelms feeble resistance at Dinant and crosses the River Meuse while, shortly after, when the Ninth Army falls back Reinhardt crosses at Monthermé.

3. BATTLE OF SEDAN

13-14 May

Guderian overcomes the French at Sedan and crosses the River Meuse. With Guderian, Rommel and Reinhardt all across, the panzer breakout begins.

4. REACHING ABBEVILLE

20 May

When the Germans reach the Channel coast at Abbeville they cut off Anglo-French forces north of the River Somme, leaving them trapped in the Dunkirk pocket.

5. OPERATION DYNAMO

26 May - 4 June

Hitler's decision to halt the panzer advance on 24 May gives the British and French a chance to secure the Dunkirk perimeter and begin the evacuation of the BEF.

6. PARIS FALLS

14 June

Fall Rot, the final conquest of France (5 June), sees the Germans enter Paris within nine days, a crushing blow for the Allies. The end is almost nigh...

7. ARRIVING IN BREST & BORDEAUX

19 June

Hoth's panzer corps reach Brest on 19 June, giving Germany full command of the French Channel coast, before pushing south to take Bordeaux.

8. FRANCE SIGNS ARMISTICE WITH GERMANY

22 June

By the time France surrenders Fall Gelb and Fall Rot have seen Germany take control of a line stretching from Bordeaux to the Swiss frontier.



Major-General Erwin Rommel (centre right) played a pivotal role in the Battle for France



plan on 21 May it was already too late. The Germans had reached Abbeville, the Ninth Army had disintegrated, and the First Army and BEF were too constricted in the north.

The counterattacking plan's efficacy became evident on 21 May when members of the BEF launched a counteroffensive at Arras, two tank battalions (74 tanks), two infantry regiments and 70 tanks from the French 3rd Light Mechanised Division thrusting into the flanks of Rommel's 7th Panzer Division and the fearsome SS Totenkopf Division, temporarily wreaking havoc. Though outnumbered, the British tanks' heavier armour gave them a clear advantage in this close-range slugfest and even the mighty warrior Rommel was shaken. He wrongly estimated that no fewer than five divisions had assailed him.

Though doing little to check the overall German advance, the attack at Arras proved pivotal for the BEF. It confirmed to the German high command that its panzer spearhead was pushing too far, too fast, and it prompted the fateful decisions to halt the panzer thrust to the Channel coast on 24 May. They remained immobile for two days. This bought the BEF vital time. For on 26 May Operation Dynamo was launched to extract the BEF from the beaches and harbour at Dunkirk. The BEF was Britain's only army and it could no longer risk obliteration in the face of such a brutal German onslaught.

Certainly, Hitler did not want the BEF to escape. Mistakenly, he thought evacuation by sea would prove impossible given the Luftwaffe's aerial supremacy, and he gave the honour of the BEF's destruction to Göring and his air forces. By the time Hitler realised his error, however, Dunkirk's defences had been completed and, thanks

to the courage of the Navy, countless small boat owners and the RAF, over 300,000 Allied troops were evacuated by the time Dunkirk fell on 4 June.

Though Operation Dynamo's success is seen as a victory in Britain, the reality was different. Hitler had missed the chance to crush Britain's one standing army, but the Dunkirk withdrawal marked the climax of a brilliant whirlwind assault that had virtually assured the outcome of the Battle for France. The Belgian army surrendered north of Dunkirk on 27 May, and the hardy troops of the French First Army were forced into surrender at Lille three days later.

In just three weeks the Germans had taken more than a million prisoners while losing only around 60,000 men. They had routed the British from France and destroyed the Dutch and Belgian armies. The French had lost 30 of their 90 divisions and were now almost entirely devoid of tanks with just three armoured divisions remaining. The only Allies still fighting their corner were two British divisions still engaged south of the Somme.

Weygand was left with 66 divisions, many of which were depleted and they now had a front that was even longer than that which had borne the brunt of the blitzkrieg assault. The Germans, meanwhile, could deploy 89 infantry divisions and 15 panzer and motorised infantry divisions, the latter split into five groups, each comprising two panzer divisions and one motorised infantry. These would provide the model for land combat for the remainder of the war in Europe.

The Luftwaffe, meanwhile, continued to operate in precise conjunction with the army and it could put some 2,500 strike aircraft – fighters and bombers – into the air. The French, on the other hand, even with aircraft

hastily purchased from the USA, and those dispatched by the RAF, could count on fewer than half that number. When the second part of the German offensive, Fall Rot, or 'Case Red', began in earnest on 5 June, France was already doomed.

Weygand and his remaining troops offered a spirited resistance and the defence of the 'Weygand Line', stretching from the Channel at Abbeville to the Maginot Line, was organised via a strategically sound principle based on a checkerboard, whereby woods and villages were crammed with men and anti-tank weapons, capable of fighting independently and able to operate even if passed by the panzer spearheads.

The defence failed, however, though not because of cowardice or lack of cunning. It faltered because the French lacked the necessary materials. The defenders fought hard and even enjoyed some successes, especially on 5 and 6 June, inflicting heavy losses on enemy tanks. Still, the first Germans arrived in Paris on 14 June, and though there are numerous accounts of continuing courage and self-sacrifice – the heroism of the Cavalry School Cadets at Saumur, for example – France offered her unconditional surrender at Compiègne on 22 June. The Battle for France was won.

France's defeat was so swift and complete that many students of war were unable to fully comprehend it. The French forces were poorly equipped for mobile operations, many were poorly trained, and for the large part they were poorly led. Simply put, France had fallen to a superior war machine. In 1940 it was the power of blitzkrieg that ensured Hitler's victory in the west. By the end of June he'd cast covetous eyes across the Channel at Britain. The fate of Europe now hung in the balance.



HITLER'S BATTLE FOR BRITAIN

The RAF's success in the skies during the summer of 1940 derailed Hitler's invasion plans and marked Nazi Germany's first military defeat



In June 1940, Britain stood alone with the fate of Europe in her hands. Thankfully, while Hitler had formulated a plan for the subjugation of both Poland and Norway, and for his crushing sweep across the Low Countries and France, he had shaped no such preparations for the invasion of Britain. Indeed, his swift success in France had caught him by surprise.

Now that France was his, Hitler believed his victory might provoke a rash of armistices with Western powers. And yet Britain remained defiant. Her British Expeditionary Force, though outmanoeuvred and outfought in France had not been overwhelmed. On the contrary, the BEF had been successfully evacuated, albeit with heavy casualties and the loss of its equipment abandoned in France.

Some believe Hitler's lack of impetus at this juncture demonstrated little real interest in an invasion of Britain and certainly the evidence suggests he would have preferred capitulation to conquest, thereby allowing him to concentrate his forces for his true aim – expansion in the east.

And yet the delay is understandable. Hitler had to await the full neutralisation of French armies still in the field, as well as seeking out suitable bases from which to launch an attack. After all, most French and Belgian ports had been destroyed during the blitzkrieg assault. In addition, while amphibious invasion was by World War II's end a well-recognised tenet in the art of war, in 1940 it was still a nascent concept. There was much to arrange.

By 16 July, 1940, however, Hitler's mind was set and he issued Führer Directive No 16



Above: Supermarine Spitfire vs Me 109 was an evenly matched contest

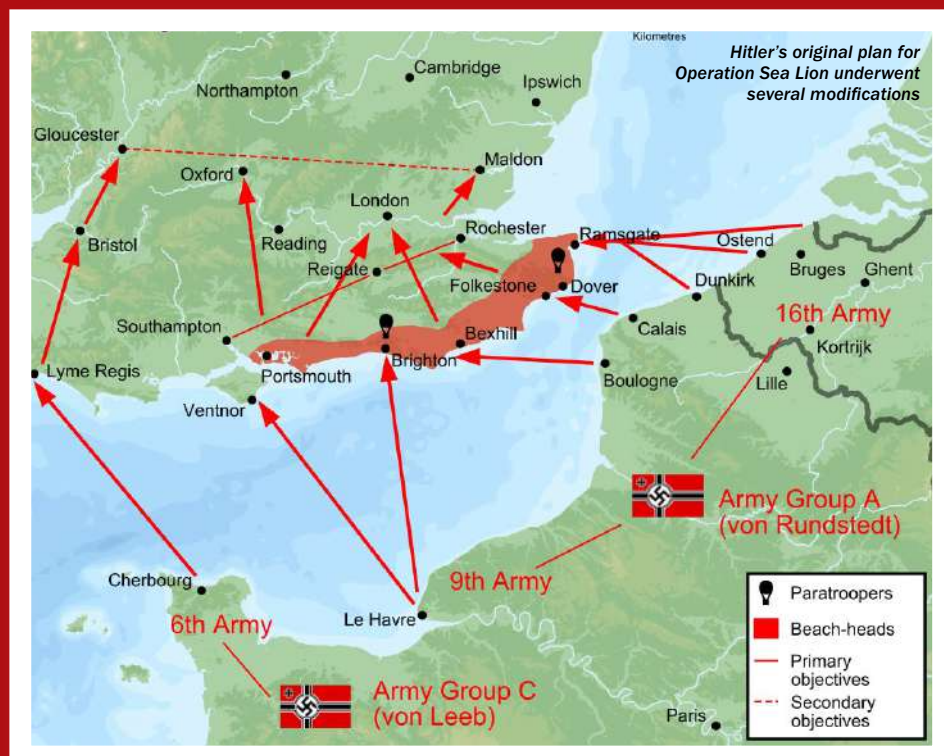
“SOME BELIEVE HITLER’S LACK OF IMPETUS AT THIS JUNCTURE DEMONSTRATED LITTLE REAL INTEREST IN AN INVASION OF BRITAIN AND CERTAINLY THE EVIDENCE SUGGESTS HE WOULD HAVE PREFERRED CAPITULATION TO CONQUEST”

INVASION PLANS: OPERATION SEA LION

In the original Sea Lion invasion plan, the German army would land in three groups, the first coming to shore between Ramsgate and Dover, the second between Dover and the Isle of Wight, the third between Dover and Lyme Bay in the west. In this version of the plan, the 6th Army, from Army Group C, was to launch from the Cherbourg peninsula to Lyme Bay, ensuring as wide a front as possible to punch inland before circling back on London (see map). The navy objected to such a wide front, claiming it did not have the requisite number of vessels to protect its flank and the operational plan shifted over the course of the summer. One constant, however, was the concentrated assault on the southeast. Here, after its success during the war in France, Army Group A would lead the incursion.

In the final plan, six divisions from the 16th Army, embarking from Rotterdam, Ostend, Antwerp, Dunkirk and Calais, would land around the Folkestone area before spreading out and seizing a bridgehead between Hadlow and Canterbury. Meanwhile, three divisions from the 9th Army at Le Havre would seize a position from Cuckmere to Brighton and push inland to extend the bridgehead. Paratroopers would land north of Dover.

The troops would land in four waves; the first, comprising 50,000 men, would land in the first two hours. The remainder (75,000 men) would follow two hours later. Then an additional two divisions were to land every fourth day so that within four weeks 16 divisions would be operating. A further nine divisions – the third and fourth wave – would be aground within six weeks.



The Heinkel 111 had a bomb load of 1,500kg, and flew numerous sorties over the south of England



Above: Hermann Göring was a WWI fighter ace before rising to the top of the Luftwaffe command chain

outlining, 'Preparations for a landing operation against England'. The action was code-named *Seelöwe*, or 'Sea Lion', and preparations were to be completed by mid-August – though inter-service bickering delayed the launch until 15 September of that year.

There was much discussion between army and navy – given the paucity of amphibious landing craft, river and coastal barges would need to be converted, for example – though Hermann Göring and his air force chiefs were noticeable by their absence from these meetings. The one thing on which all three services did agree was that the landward assault could only begin once the Luftwaffe had established control of the skies.

On 1 August Hitler announced his intended subjugation of the RAF. 'The German air force is to overcome the British air force with all means at its disposal,' he said, with these words decreeing the Battle of Britain. And this would prove a revolutionary clash, a form of

contest the world had never seen before. For while aircraft had played an important role in the Battle of France, German aerial supremacy flourished in support of the Wehrmacht's land forces, which were the true architects of victory. The Battle of Britain, on the other hand, represented the first time that aircraft would be scrambled with the intention of simply breaking the enemy's will and capability to resist without the use of their land armies. A German victory in the skies would also obviate British bombing sorties and would allow for the Luftwaffe to crush Britain's greatest military asset, the Royal Navy.

In truth, even as Hitler gave the order for the Luftwaffe to step up its operation against Britain, he harboured the ambition that his enemy would, when defeated in the air, meekly sue for peace. Operation Sea Lion, he hoped, would never come to fruition. As it transpired, Sea Lion would stall but this was down to British and not German success in the skies.

At the outset Göring believed a German victory would be rapid. He held the RAF in low regard and allocated just four days to clear the skies on a line south from Gloucester to London. He had estimated its total annihilation in just four weeks. He offered no structured plan and operated throughout the conflict via pure improvisation. Some would now say that his confidence was entirely misplaced.

For a start he underestimated Britain's excellent air-defence systems, which at the time were the best in the world. The 52 radar stations, which lined the coast from the tip of western Wales, all the way around to the Shetland Isles, played a pivotal role in the Battle of Britain, the early warnings allowing the RAF to significantly reduce the number of standing patrols, which in turn conserved fuel and pilot wellbeing. Squadrons were only scrambled to meet a specific threat.

In addition, the RAF was operating from its home bases, which were geared up to

"COMMAND COULD CALL UPON 469 HURRICANES AND 283 SPITFIRES, AS WELL AS AROUND 100 OF THE OLDER DEFIAINT AND BLENHEIM FIGHTERS"

service their two excellent fighters, the Hawker Hurricane and Supermarine Spitfire. The Luftwaffe, meanwhile, were forced to improvise, by adopting captured bases on the European mainland, and then sending their own excellent fighters, most notably the Messerschmitt Bf 109E, on sorties across the Channel.

In the aftermath of air combat, the RAF could recover damaged aircraft and their pilots, while the Germans could not, although they did have an effective recovery system in operation over the Channel. When it came to numbers, however, the Luftwaffe held the advantage.

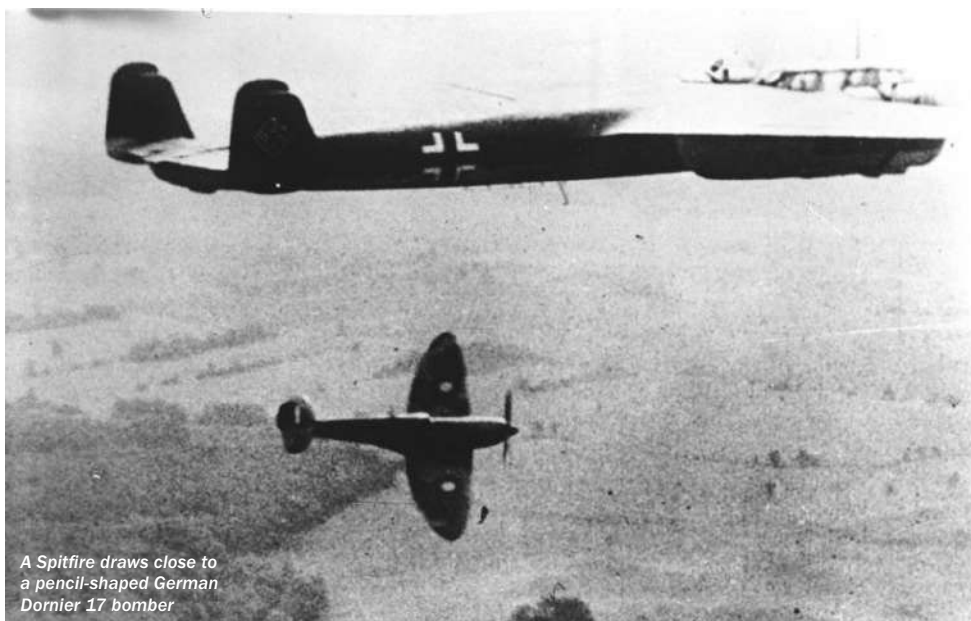
In July 1940 Göring could call on 900 single-engined Me 109s and 280 twin-engined Me 110s, though the latter, while sturdy fighters, were easily outmanoeuvred by the more nimble Spitfires and Hurricanes. The Luftwaffe could also call upon almost 950 serviceable bombers – whether the slow and steady Heinkel 111, the pencil-shaped Dornier 17 or the newer, speedier Junkers 88. They also boasted 340 serviceable Junkers 87, or Stuka, dive-bombers, which had proved so lethal during the conquest of Europe, though they had a short range and had yet to come up against the highly agile RAF fighters in great numbers.

During the same period, RAF Fighter Command could call upon 469 Hurricanes and 283 Spitfires, as well as around 100 of the older Defiant and Blenheim fighters, though these were largely ineffectual when compared to their speedy siblings.

If the Luftwaffe held an advantage in numbers, it also had more experienced pilots, many of whom had fought in the Spanish Civil War before engaging in blitzkrieg operations against Poland, Norway and Western Europe. As the aggressor, the Luftwaffe could also choose its targets.

In the summer of 1940 the only thing standing in the way of Hitler's conquest of the West were the RAF's 750 fighters and its highly capable senior officers, most notably Air Chief Marshal Hugh Dowding, the commander-in-chief of Fighter Command, and Air Vice-Marshal Keith Park, who commanded the crucial No 11 Group, the most important of the four fighter groups with a remit encompassing London and the southeast. These men proved crucial to the RAF's victory, with their decision not to commit fighters in large wings, for example, though earning official disapproval, proving to be a masterstroke.

Their enemy, Göring, was nowhere near as accomplished a commander, though he undoubtedly believed that he was. A vainglorious boaster, and a dashing fighter ace during World War I, Göring was now more patrician politician than airman and severely overestimated the Luftwaffe's potential, while underestimating the RAF's.



A Spitfire draws close to a pencil-shaped German Dornier 17 bomber



Commander-in-chief of Fighter Command Hugh Dowding had been an implacable opponent of committing RAF resources to the war in France

In truth, the Battle of Britain was a campaign rather than a single battle, forming part of a sustained German air offensive against Britain that began in June 1940 and evolved into what Londoners would term 'the Blitz', which lasted until May in the following year, when the Luftwaffe was recalled for muster on the Eastern Front. Many historians now divide the Battle of Britain into five distinct phases.

The first was the Channel Battle, which lasted from 10 July to mid-August and comprised a clutch of airborne skirmishes. And though it accounted for 30,000 tons of British shipping and gave the Luftwaffe temporary daylight control over the Straits of Dover, the Germans lost twice as many aircraft as the British. Crucially, the dogfights also allowed the relatively inexperienced RAF pilots to cut their teeth so that when the second phase of the battle began on Eagle Day (Adlertag), 13 August, many had earned their spurs.

On the day preceding Adlertag, the Luftwaffe struck at key airfields and radar stations along the south coast, crippling the radar station at Ventnor on the Isle of Wight. The day's fighting saw the Luftwaffe lose 31 aircraft, the RAF 22.

Then, on 13 August Göring launched his Eagle Day, which he hoped would conclude with the destruction of Fighter Command, though it proved something of a damp squib. There were no repeat attacks on the radar stations and German bombers committed many resources to the heavy bombing of the aerodromes at Andover, Eastchurch and Detling, mistakenly believing that they were fighter bases. A successful strike was made on a Spitfire factory at Castle Bromwich but, by the day's end, the Germans had lost 45 aircraft to Fighter Command's 13.

The most concerted German effort of the entire campaign came on 15 August, with 1,786 sorties flown across seven major raids, and it was the one and only time that every available Messerschmitt, from all three of the German air fleets, or Luftflotten – operating out of France (Luftflotte 3), the Low Countries (Luftflotte 2) and German-held Scandinavia (Luftflotte 5) – took to the air.

The result was an important victory for the British. Not only did Luftwaffe losses outstrip the RAF's – 74 aircraft against 34 – but an incursion from Luftflotte 5 took such a heavy beating that no further daylight raids were launched against northern England. Göring had expected Dowding to leave the north largely unprotected in a bid to concentrate his fighters in the southeast but German bombers met heavy resistance and it was here that his longer-ranged but clunky Messerschmitt 110 fighters were shown to be no match for the much more agile Hurricanes and Spitfires.



Above: X4474 was a late production Mk I Spitfire that fought with 19 Squadron during September 1940

Undaunted, the Luftwaffe launched another bid to cripple Fighter Command on the day following, with 1,700 sorties flown, though it again proved an expensive outing with 45 planes lost. The RAF lost just 21. The four days Göring had allocated to crush British fighter resistance had passed, though poor intelligence gathering led him to believe that the RAF was at breaking point, with perhaps just 300 fighters left in service. They had twice that number. Accordingly, the Germans geared up for another push, again targeting airfields in the south in a bid to get as many RAF fighters into the air as possible.

But Göring had not anticipated Dowding and Park's strategic acumen. Despite the Luftwaffe efforts, the RAF had for the most part avoided taking on the Messerschmitt 109s in open combat, instead concentrating their efforts against bomber raids. This then meant the German fighters were required for escort support rather than the offensive sweep to which they were so well suited. When on 18 August the Luftwaffe again suffered heavy casualties – losing 71 aircraft to the British 27 – Göring changed tack.

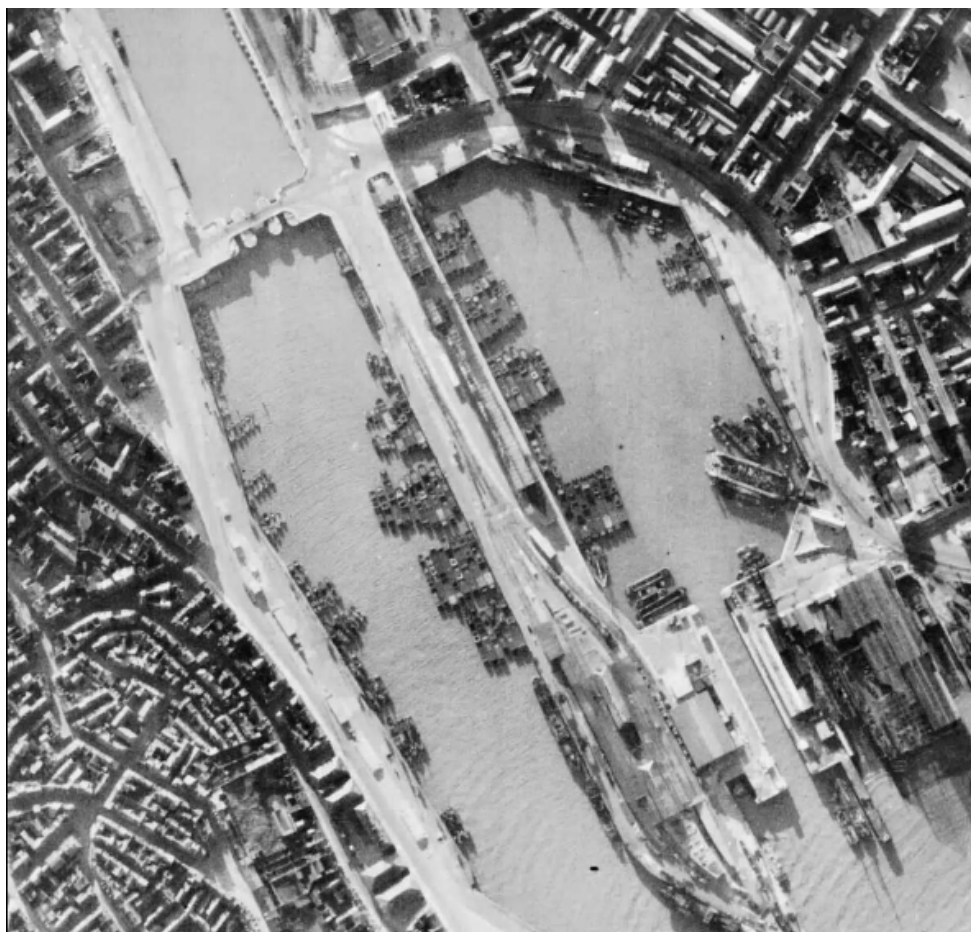
He withdrew the Stukas from attack as they'd proved especially vulnerable to British fighters, and decided that he'd concentrate his sorties specifically against the airfields of Fighter Command, in the hope of finally bringing the British fighters out in force, while also damaging them at source. It was a risky strategy as the Luftwaffe would need to fly further inland but when this third phase of the battle opened on 24 August, the Germans scored a devastating success against No 11 Group's aerodrome at Manston, while the base at North Weald was also hit.

Further successes followed. On 30 August and 4 September vital aircraft production factories were hit, while London's main fighter base at Biggin Hill was struck six times in just three days, suffering heavy casualties. Between 24 August and 6 September the RAF lost 290 fighters. The Germans lost 380 aircraft but only half were fighters. The Luftwaffe had finally gained the upper hand.

At this crucial juncture, with Fighter Command stretched to breaking point, the Germans again changed tack. The move, heralding the penultimate phase of the battle,



Above: The operational windows of Fighter Command's four groups and the Luftwaffe's three air fleets during the Battle of Britain; Luftflotte 5 flew from Scandinavia



Above: German invasion barges waiting at Boulogne Harbour in France ahead of the intended invasion of Britain

was a disaster. Hitler delayed Sea Lion's launch again, until 21 September, but if he was to achieve this date, he needed to neutralise Fighter Command so that his air force could knock out the Royal Navy.

Hence, the Germans decided to strike at London itself. This, they hoped, would commit more fighters to the air, while also potentially breaking the will of the British people and damaging her government ahead of the invasion. Hitler also sought retribution for British bombing strikes on Berlin (ordered after the accidental bombing of London by the Luftwaffe on 24 August), an event that Göring had assured him was an impossibility.

On 7 September, the Battle of Britain reached its climax as the Battle of London began. In the late afternoon 300 German bombers escorted by 600 fighters struck at London's Docklands, taking Fighter Command largely by surprise. The raging fires acted as beacons for further sorties launched that night. Poor conditions meant that further attacks were less frequent than Hitler desired but sorties were flown on 9, 11 and 14 September, with the latter proving especially destructive.

Hitler, however, was becoming impatient. RAF Bomber Command had begun attacks on his invasion barges and he knew time was running out for Sea Lion. He decided to postpone a decision on Sea Lion until 17 September. His hand was eventually forced on 15 September when a major air assault went awry, a vast bomber fleet being intercepted by some 250 British fighters who inflicted massive losses. By the time a second wave had been turned back,

the RAF had shot down 60 aircraft. Despite Göring's insistence that Fighter Command was almost spent, on 17 September, Hitler postponed Sea Lion indefinitely. Two days later the invasion fleet was ordered to disperse.

Sea Lion's cancellation did not end the Battle of Britain. Rather, it ushered in the fifth and final phase, as through October the Luftwaffe continued to bomb London at night, though never with the same intensity as during the Battle of London. By the end of the month it had become clear that the Luftwaffe had lost the Battle of Britain.

The defeat was slender. During the critical months of August and September, Fighter Command lost 832 fighters, the Luftwaffe 668; it was the loss of 600 German bombers that tips the tally sheet in the RAF's favour. The Luftwaffe failed because of Göring's muddled thinking, the efficacy of British radar and the skill of both British pilots and their commanders. Vitally, British aircraft production far outstripped German and between June and September 1940, the Luftwaffe received an average of only 190 Me 109s a month compared to Fighter Command's 470 Hurricanes and Spitfires.

Nazi Germany had suffered its first defeat and when Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa against Russia in June 1941 he did so with an increasingly powerful enemy mechanising at his rear while also offering itself as a staging post for American intervention. Certainly, the survival of an independent Britain was a critical component in Hitler's ultimate defeat.



Above: A clutch of different nationalities flew with the RAF and five per cent of pilots were Polish, who were said to have accounted for 15 per cent of Luftwaffe losses

SPITFIRE & HURRICANE VS ME 109

The Hawker Hurricane was the RAF's most plentiful single-engined fighter plane, though the Supermarine Spitfire was faster, more elegant and easier to handle. Both enjoyed Rolls-Royce Merlin engines and each packed an eight-gun punch from four .303 machine guns mounted in each wing. The Hurricane's construction materials – cloth and wood – made it more difficult to shoot down than the Spitfire and it was also more stable as a gun platform. Both had a relatively short range of around 800km, but as they were defending their own territory this was not a significant drawback during the Battle of Britain.

The only single-engined German fighter to engage in the battle was the Messerschmitt Bf 109E, which had a top speed of around 560km/h at 3,800m, which put it on a par with the Spitfire but gave it a 48km/h advantage over the Hurricane. It had a narrow undercarriage, making it difficult to fly, though its engine was fuel-injected, which meant it could climb faster than the British fighters and dive without the risk of the engine cutting out. It boasted two 20mm cannons in its wings and two 7.92mm machine guns in its nose, giving it greater firepower than its British counterparts, though it demanded better marksmanship. Its range of just 640km gave it a short fighting window, while both the Hurricane and Spitfire could easily turn inside it, providing Fighter Command with a key advantage during dogfights.



Above: The Hawker Hurricane had a ceiling of around 10,300m



INSIDE ROMMEL'S AFRIKA KORPS

This widely lauded German force was among the few unblemished by brutality – but what was life like serving under Hitler's Desert Fox?

On 6 February 1941, General Erwin Rommel found a few minutes to write a letter to his wife. He and Lucie had been married for almost 25 years, and Germany's most dashing general liked to keep her abreast with his news. "Things are moving fast," wrote Rommel, who mentioned he had met Adolf Hitler earlier in the day. "I can only take the barest necessities with me. Perhaps I'll be able to get the rest out soon. I need not tell you how my head is swimming with all the many things that are to be done." The letter ended with a lament from Rommel that his brief leave with his wife had been cut short. "Don't be sad," he wrote. "The new job is very big and important."

Rommel spent the following days in a whirlwind of preparation and planning for his 'new job'. There was no other option. Hitler had appointed him commander of the newly formed Afrika Korps, raised as a direct consequence of Britain's crushing victory over the Italians in North Africa in December 1940.

When Rommel's aircraft touched down at Tripoli on 12 February, he was determined to drive the British out of North Africa. As the first German units began arriving at the city's harbour, he insisted that the 6,000-ton transport ship was unloaded in record time so that he could get his soldiers up to the front with all possible haste. "The men received their tropical kit early next morning," wrote their general. "They radiated complete assurance of victory, and the change of atmosphere did not pass unnoticed in Tripoli."



*This propaganda picture
was taken in February
1943, just a few months
before the surrender of
the Afrika Korps*



The month after the first elements of the Afrika Korps disembarked at Tripoli, thousands of kilometres north in Saxony, an 18-year-old conscript was reporting for his first day of 16 weeks of basic infantry training. Rudolf Schneider came from Stauchitz, a village in the flat farmland between Leipzig and Dresden, and had studied agriculture at college before the outbreak of war.

His infantry training complete, Schneider was posted to North Africa in early 1942 to join the Afrika Korps. "When I arrived in Libya, I was interviewed by an officer," recalled Schneider. "They sent me to the Kampfstaffel, General Rommel's personal combat unit of nearly 400 men, which was commanded by Rudolph Kiehl."

Kiehl had served under Rommel in 1939 in the Führer-Begleit-Battalion, Adolf Hitler's bodyguard unit, and the Kampfstaffel served a similar purpose to the Afrika Korps' commander in North Africa.

"I was selected for the Kampfstaffel because I knew a lot about British and American vehicles," said Schneider. "As part of my education I had learned how to drive English and American tractors and trucks, and the fact I spoke English was also a factor."

Schneider arrived in Libya at the moment Rommel's supply problems were coming to a head. In March 1942, the Afrika Korps took delivery of 18,000 tons of supplies, 42,000 tons fewer than he estimated his army required for victory in North Africa. He also received a few thousand additional men to augment

"DUBBED THE DESERT FOX, HIS RESOURCEFULNESS, FEARLESSNESS AND WILLINGNESS TO SHARE THE SAME HARDSHIPS AS HIS MEN ENDEARED HIM TO THE AFRIKA KORPS"

his three German divisions, but demands for additional formations were refused because Berlin's priority was the Eastern Front.

In the year or so between the Afrika Korps arriving in Libya and Schneider's posting to North Africa, the Desert War had witnessed a series of fierce, bloody battles with neither side able to land a knockout blow. Rommel had enjoyed the most recent success, an offensive in February that saw the Allies pushed back to a defensive position running south from Gazala to Bir Hacheim. The Gazala Line, as it was known, had been occupied a few months earlier by the Afrika Korps. However, a British offensive dislodged them in November/December 1941.

It was characteristic of the Desert War, a fluid conflict that ranged back and forth across Libya, in which armour was crucial. Rommel had shown his genius for armoured warfare as commander of the 7th Panzer Division during the invasion of France in 1940, but in Libya he quickly realised that mass tank battles were futile. Instead, he deployed his 88mm anti-aircraft guns as anti-tank guns, using them to destroy the enemy's armour before sending his panzers forward to wreak havoc on the exposed artillery and infantry.

The boldness of Rommel (who was promoted to field marshal in June 1942) soon became legendary. Dubbed the Desert Fox, his resourcefulness, fearlessness and willingness to share the same hardships as his men, endeared him to the Afrika Korps. He wasn't a commander who inspired love in his men; he was too brusque and abrasive for that. Instead he inspired confidence.

Rudolf Schneider soon learned for himself what sort of man his commander was when he was selected as one of Rommel's drivers. "When I drove him he rarely talked and obviously I was very intimidated by him," reflected Schneider. "I was just a young soldier driving a general. He was not a man for small talk, not with me or anyone. If he asked a question, he wanted an answer, brief and concise. If you talked too long, he would tell you to shut up."

Clockwise from below: – A Bantam jeep in the hands of two Afrika Korps soldiers

– Schneider recalls that while they liked their caps, the they were jealous of the Eighth Army's lightweight uniform

– Rommel, second from right, seen inspecting some of his men in the summer of 1942

– The Kampfstaffel at rest. Neither the SAS nor the LRDG ever used tents when on operations in the desert



MACHINES OF THE KORPS

VEHICLES WERE CRUCIAL IN THE DESERT WAR AND THOUGH THE PANZERS WERE A POTENT WEAPON, THE AFRIKA KORPS OFTEN HAD TO IMPROVISE BECAUSE OF SUPPLY PROBLEMS

A Panzer III F model, advances across the Western Desert during the Gazala campaign, June 1942



PANZER MK III

For much of the war in North Africa, the Afrika Korps used the Panzer Mark II and III tanks, with the more advanced Tiger Tank not arriving until late 1942. Manufactured by Daimler-Benz, the model from the late 1930s onwards, the Mark III, had a 50mm cannon and two 7.92mm machine guns, as well as thicker armour than its rivals. These features gave the panzers superiority over Allied tanks until the arrival of the Sherman in autumn 1942. Another innovative feature of the Mk III – which had a crew of five – was a three-seat turret complete with intercom system.

“THE SAS BEGAN USING JEEPS IN THE DESERT IN 1942 AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS WAS EVIDENT TO THE AFRIKA KORPS, WHO AVIDLY USED ANY OF THE AMERICAN-MADE VEHICLES THEY CAPTURED”

WILLYS BANTAMS JEEP

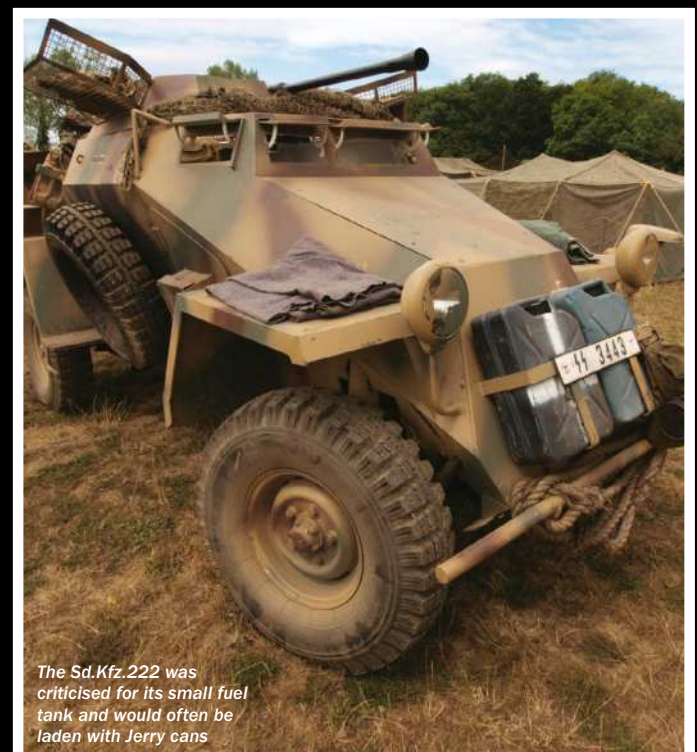
The SAS began using Jeeps in the desert in 1942 and their effectiveness was evident to the Afrika Korps, who avidly used any of the American-made vehicles they captured. Fitted with heavy machine gun mountings, the Jeeps had a payload of 270 kilograms and a maximum range of approximately 400 kilometres on a single tank of fuel.



Rudolf Schneider is seen here digging out his Willys Jeep

SD.KFZ.222 RECONNAISSANCE CAR

The Sd.Kfz.222 was an armoured reconnaissance car that was effective because of its armament – a 20mm cannon and machine gun in its open turret – and performance. With its rear-mounted 90 horsepower liquid-cooled engine, the vehicle was capable of reaching 69 kilometres per hour on roads. It was also known for its durability.



The Sd.Kfz.222 was criticised for its small fuel tank and would often be laden with Jerry cans

"I wouldn't say he was arrogant but he believed in himself too much as a commander. He didn't ask the opinion of his other officers, he had great confidence in his own decisions... and some German officers didn't like Rommel."

Schneider also remembered his commander as, "...a very straight and correct officer... he didn't fear anything and we, the soldiers, respected him."

Rommel's rectitude was one reason why the North African campaign is remembered as the only 'clean' theatre of the war, inasmuch as any war can be 'clean'. The other reason was the absence of SS units or the Gestapo. "I never saw any Nazis the whole time I served in the Afrika Korps," recalled Schneider. "In the Kampfstaffel, our conduct had to be exemplary. One time, I think in Bouerat (a town in western Libya), a German soldier, not from my unit, raped a local woman. Rommel had him shot and the firing squad came from my unit – 12 men but only six of the rifles had live rounds."

Schneider glimpsed Rommel's 'correctness' at first hand, not long after joining the Kampfstaffel. Having driven Rommel to inspect some tank positions, Schneider alerted his commander to the approach of a vehicle. As it neared, they saw through the dust it was a British ambulance. "I was on my rounds and accidentally ran my ambulance into a German tank position," remembered Alex Franks of the 7th Armoured Company. "I was terrified."

Schneider estimated there were about 20 members of the Kampfstaffel, as well as Rommel, speaking English. They ordered Franks out of the vehicle. "He came out with 20 rifles pointed at him and Rommel said 'Stand to



Two members of the Kampfstaffel on a captured LRDG radio truck. The soldier on the left is trying out the Vickers K

attention, you are in front of a German general," recalled Schneider. "Rommel then asked him where he came from. Alex told him he was an ambulance driver who had lost his way. Rommel asked if he had a compass and Alex said that he didn't." The ambulance was searched for weapons but there were none, and Rommel then asked Franks his destination. It was a hospital but Franks was way off the beaten track. "Rommel pointed him in the right direction and off he went," recalled Schneider. Franks survived the war and met Schneider in 2009.

Rommel had been inspecting his tank positions as part of preparations for a major offensive against the British positions along the Gazala Line. The aim of this was to capture Tobruk, the Libyan port that had remained

stubbornly in Allied hands throughout the fluctuations of the Desert War.

The offensive began on 26 May 1942, with the Italian infantry launching a frontal assault on the British and South African troops holding the Gazala Line. Rommel had held a poor opinion of his Latin allies since arriving in Libya in February 1941. Within a few weeks, his adjutant, Major Schraepler, was writing to Rommel's wife about the deficiencies of the Italians: "They either do not come forward at all, or if they do, they run at the first shot," he explained. "If an Englishman so much as comes in sight, their hands go up."

Schneider didn't share this view of Germany's ally. "The Italian soldier was a very good soldier but very badly treated," he said. "The Italian

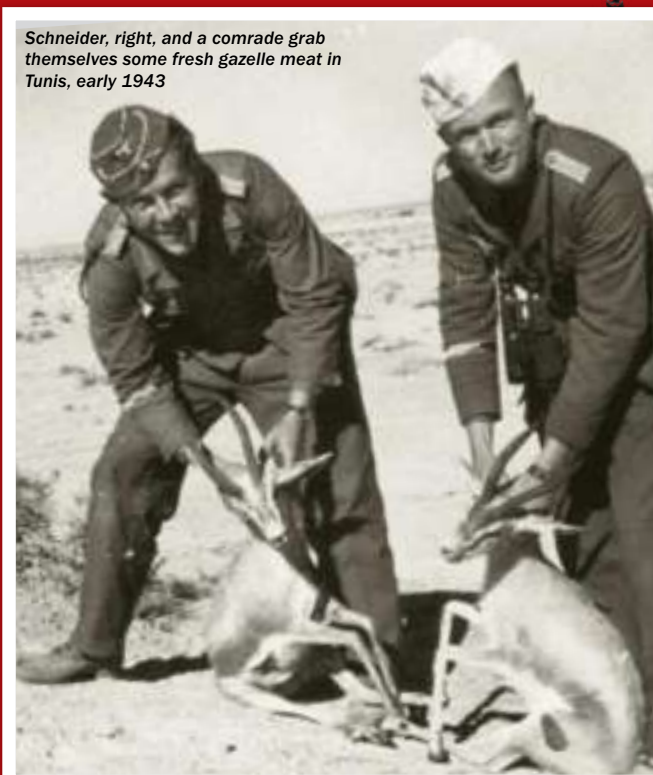
LIFE IN THE KAMPFSTAFFEL

THE KAMPFSTAFFEL WAS ROMMEL'S ELITE 400-STRONG COMBAT FORCE. RUDOLF SCHNEIDER WAS THE LAST SURVIVOR OF THE UNIT WHOSE JOB WAS TO PROTECT THE DESERT FOX

Born in April 1923 in rural eastern Germany, Rudolf Schneider enrolled at the German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture in Witzenhausen in the 1930s. His dream was to farm in south west Africa (present day Namibia), but in 1941, shortly after his 18th birthday, Schneider was drafted into the army. He underwent basic training in Dresden before being shipped to North Africa in early 1942 to join the newly formed Afrika Korps. Once in Libya, his knowledge of British and American vehicles – gained at agricultural college – proved so valuable that he was selected to join the Kampfstaffel, Rommel's reconnaissance/bodyguard force of nearly 400 soldiers. "I was one of Rommel's drivers," said Schneider. "I was chosen because I knew English and could operate their equipment. I also had a good memory for landscapes, which was important in the desert. We would drive long distances and all you would see was stones and sand, stones and sand." Schneider was captured in May 1943 and sent to the USA, where he spent the rest of the war as a prisoner in Camp Swift, Texas. He spent many of his days as a prisoner picking cotton for five cents an hour. After the war, Schneider returned to Europe, but the British, discovering he had been a member of Rommel's Kampfstaffel, detained him when his ship arrived in Liverpool. He spent three years working as a farm labourer in Staffordshire. He finally returned to then East Germany in 1948, and married his childhood sweetheart, who had waited for him.

"ONCE IN LIBYA, HIS KNOWLEDGE OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN VEHICLES PROVED SO VALUABLE THAT HE WAS SELECTED TO JOIN THE KAMPFSTAFFEL"

Schneider, right, and a comrade grab themselves some fresh gazelle meat in Tunis, early 1943



"IT HAD BEEN AGREED IN EARLY 1941 THAT THE ITALIANS WOULD SUPPLY THE AFRIKA KORPS WITH RATIONS, WHICH THEY DID, BUT WHAT THEY PROVIDED WAS BARELY FIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION"

officers had special food and the soldiers had poorer food. The Italian officers had brothels but not the soldiers. The officers in general had a better standard of living. In the Afrika Korps, officers and men had the same food and shared the same conditions."

One source of simmering discontent between the Germans and the Italians concerned rations. Schneider recalled that, "Italian officers didn't like Rommel because... there wasn't much trust." The antipathy was reciprocated by the German commander and his men, all of whom blamed the Italian high command for the poor quality of their rations. It had been agreed in early 1941 that the Italians would supply the Afrika Korps with rations, which they did, but what they provided was barely fit for human consumption. "This was one of the reasons we didn't believe in the Italians, they didn't keep their word [about rations]," explains Schneider. "They had a lot of fresh oranges, and we didn't get any."

Instead, the Afrika Korps received tins of preserved meat, on which were stamped the initials AM. They stood for 'Amministrazione Militare' but the Italian soldiers and their German counterparts preferred 'Asinus Mussolini' (Mussolini's arse). Another source of complaint

for the Germans was the hard black bread.

Yet despite their resentment with the rations, the Afrika Korps ate what they received with characteristic stoicism. It was one of the features of the Korps, a discipline and camaraderie nurtured in the German Army's training, underpinned by the classlessness of National Socialism.

Schneider confirmed the view. "In the Kampfstaffel, the men came from everywhere: Saxony, Bavaria, Prussia or, in Rommel's case, Swabia, in south west Germany. No one region dominated and there were no factions. We all got on."

German military training also placed an emphasis on always making ground as a team, a mobility that was interdependent and interchangeable across the army so that an infantryman, tankman, artilleryman and engineer all had an implicit trust in one another's role. This instilled in the German soldier a confidence and adaptability that was absent from their British counterparts.

Broad as the parameters of the Afrika Korps' training were, they didn't allow officers



Above: An M40 steel helmet of the Afrika Korps. These were fitted with ventilation holes to help with the baking heat

to go outside of this framework, unlike the British, who possessed a type of officer more innovative and imaginative than most on the German side. Two such men were David Stirling, founder of the Special Air Service (SAS), and Ralph Bagnold, who, in June 1940, raised the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG).

There were sound military reasons why Rommel never formed a special forces unit to rival that of the SAS and LRDG, notably the constant fuel constraints and the fact that the British military installations were less remote and better guarded. Ultimately, however, it

Another German propaganda image shows a heavily armed Afrika Korps patrol. Note the scorpion symbol on the bonnet



With dust and sandstorms a regular occurrence, some soldiers went to extreme lengths to protect their faces



was because the German military mind was predicated on organisation and not innovation. "It is true that we didn't have the initiative of the British," said Schneider. "We were trained to fight and think as a team not as individuals."

Additionally, the Afrika Korps was more wary of the desert than the LRDG. Ralph Bagnold was an eminent desert explorer in the 1920s, as were several other LRDG officers. They had accumulated a knowledge and respect for the environment that gave them a confidence – although crucially not an over-confidence – to penetrate into the heart of the desert, while the Afrika Korps preferred to keep close to the coastal regions. "We knew the LRDG were situated around Siwa (oasis) but we were told to keep our distance," remembered Schneider. "We didn't like to go too far into the desert, because if we were wounded, there would be no one who would come and help us. Occasionally we saw LRDG patrols, but we had instructions not to go after them."

Nonetheless, when the Axis forces launched their offensive on 26 May 1942, Rommel led his Afrika Korps south into the desert, while the Italians attacked the Gazala Line. In effect, the German commander was throwing a right hook at the Allies, sweeping round the French garrison in Bir Hacheim and attacking the British behind the Gazala line. "We drove south

of Bir Hacheim and then came at the Gazala Line from the east," recalled Schneider. "He (Rommel) said we would break the Line from the rear. During the day we laid up, hiding our vehicles because the RAF controlled the skies, and so we drove only at night... Rommel led us. He did the navigating. We didn't know where we were going. He just ordered us to follow him."

For three days the Axis and Allied armour fought, while the First Free French Brigade held out at Bir Hacheim. Rommel recalled on 28 May that, "...British tanks opened fire on my command post, which was located close beside the Kampfstaffel and our vehicles. Shells fell all around us and the windscreen of our command omnibus flew into fragments."

Schneider's hand and stomach were peppered with shrapnel: flesh wounds mostly, not enough to take him out of the battle. But the intensity of the British resistance caused Rommel to order his Afrika Korps to pull back and form a defensive position called 'The Cauldron'. The British drove on, confident that a victory was within their grasp, but the Afrika Korps, despite losing some 200 tanks in four days of fighting, countered with the German 88mm anti-tank guns, inflicting a heavy toll on the British armour. On 10 June, Bir Hacheim fell and three days later the British armour was defeated on 'Black Saturday'.

The Eighth Army retreated from the Gazala Line, withdrawing all the way to El Alamein in what became known as the 'Gazala Gallop'. On 21 June, Tobruk finally fell to the Germans, along with about 35,000 British and Commonwealth troops. Schneider remembered the fall of Tobruk as a "wonderful" moment – not because of the victory but because of the British rations. "We had lived for months on this heavy black bread and these awful Italian rations. Suddenly we found fresh fruit and vegetables, even strawberry jam."

Life in North Africa was unquestionably tougher for the Afrika Korps than for their enemies. The Allies were well supplied and were also able to rest and recuperate in sophisticated cities with delights on offer that the German forces could only dream of. "Unlike the British, who had Alexandria and Cairo, which were full of restaurants and bars and other things, we had no cities like that," reflected Schneider. "So the opportunity to escape from the war for a few days wasn't possible." Even in the few towns that were in their hands, such as Benghazi and El Agheila, "...it was forbidden, on the orders of Rommel, to enter a restaurant where Italian soldiers were, and we would be punished if we disobeyed him."

There were other spoils of war to be had in Tobruk, aside from strawberry jam. "We

captured field guns and tanks – Matildas and also some Stuarts – and some command vehicles,” said Schneider. “We started to use those but we preferred to use our own small arms, the 98k carbine and MP40 (Schmeisser), which were good weapons.” By the summer of 1942, 85 per cent of the Afrika Korps’ transport consisted of vehicles manufactured in Britain and America.

In his memoir of the Desert War, *Alamein*, Major Paolo Caccia-Dominioni, an Italian engineer, wrote that: “Captain Kiel [sic], the commander of Rommel’s Kampfstaffel, invented a new sport for the entertainment of his men: tall and fair as they were, dressed in British khaki, bare-headed in accordance with the fashion current in both armies, driving captured vehicles that still bore their original markings. They would infiltrate among the enemy rearguard, tag along quietly for a while – and then suddenly reveal their true identity with the merry rattle of machine-gun fire! Any number of prisoners had been rounded up in this way.”

While Schneider agreed that they did indeed use the captured Allied vehicles, he dismissed the idea they wore the enemy’s uniform. “It was strictly forbidden to put on any part of the British uniform,” he said. “But we actually liked the British uniform in the desert because it was light. Our uniform was cotton but it was heavier than what the British had to wear, although we liked our caps.”

On 23 June, Rommel’s men crossed the Libyan border on the heels of the retreating British Eighth Army. Six days later, the Kampfstaffel and the 90 Light Division entered Mersa Matruh. The Allies’ last coastal fortress was now in German hands but it would be the last decisive success of Rommel’s campaign. On 3 July, Rommel wrote to his wife that, “...resistance is too great and our strength exhausted.”

The Afrika Korps had sent the Allies fleeing back into Egypt but they had reached the end of their supply line, and of their endurance. “After we took Tobruk, we got the order as Rommel’s personal combat unit to cross the Libyan border and attack Mersa Matruh,” reflected Schneider. “It was one of the greatest mistakes of Rommel, to push towards El Alamein. He

should have gone back to the Egypt border once again.”

A little under four months later, General Montgomery launched his offensive at El Alamein, the battle that would ultimately win the war in the desert for the Allies. “We knew that the British were preparing to attack El Alamein but we didn’t know the power they had,” said Schneider. “On 23 October, they started the attack. We were in the south of the Alamein line, only lightly defended because Rommel thought Montgomery would attack the north of the line. When the British attacked we fought them off, but then received orders to withdraw slowly through an anti-tank defensive position about 50 kilometres west of El Alamein... we didn’t believe it when we were ordered to withdraw.”

Kampfstaffel Kiehl fought with great gallantry in the initial assault on the Alamein Line, using the American Honey tanks they had captured at Gazala to push back the Free French. Further north, the fighting was just as ferocious but, gradually and inexorably, the Allies began to advance west.

Schneider and the rest of the Afrika Korps began a withdrawal that while disciplined and orderly, continued for the next six months as the Allies pushed across Libya and into Tunisia.

“My last fight with the British was at Sidi Ali el Hattab, just west of Tunis,” said Schneider. “We captured six British soldiers and we wondered what to do with them. Our commanders told us it was forbidden to shoot them, so we shared our rations with them, but at this point we had hardly any left. Just stale black bread. No toilet paper or coffee, and we were making tea by boiling water and adding some leaves from trees. The British soldiers looked at us and said, ‘you live like dogs’. They didn’t understand, seeing the state we were in, why we continued to fight.”

Schneider was eventually captured by American troops near to Kelibia in Tunisia on 16 May 1943. “On the one hand, I was happy to have survived when so many of my comrades had died,” he reflected. “But we were prisoners and we all wondered what would now happen to us.”



Above: An infantryman stands beside a knocked out M3 Lee in Tunisia, December 1942

Schneider was shipped to the USA where he spent the rest of the war. When he finally returned to what was, by then, East Germany, he learned that of the 389 soldiers in the Kampfstaffel, “...only 39 came back.” He was one of the lucky ones, perhaps the luckiest of all, because waiting for him when he returned to Saxony was his girlfriend, Alfreda, whose photograph he had kept with him throughout seven years of separation. “I didn’t talk to Rommel much, but one of [the] few times he spoke to me was to ask if I had a girlfriend,” said Schneider. “I said ‘I do, Herr General’, and he replied ‘I hope only one’.”

Below: The Afrika Korps never raised a unit similar to that of the SAS, some of whom are seen here in Egypt in early 1942



Images: Alamy, Getty, Rex Features

Panzer IIIs of the Afrika Korps charge through the desert of Libya



Roger-Viollet/Rex/Shutterstock



MOMENT IN TIME

Hitler meets troops on 7 June 1944, one day after the Normandy landings. At this point in the war many officers were beginning to have doubts about Hitler's leadership



*Below: German soldiers
raise the Nazi flag over
the Acropolis in 1941.
The occupation of Athens
lasted until October 1944*



UNTIMELY FORAY INTO THE BALKANS

Mussolini's misadventure in Greece precipitated Germany's Balkan intervention, delaying Hitler's offensive against the Soviet Union and straining resources for the rest of World War II

Despite the lacklustre recent performance of his forces in Africa, Benito Mussolini's dream of a new Roman Empire would not die. On 28 October 1940, Il Duce unleashed the Italian Army against Greece from neighbouring Albania, conquered in the spring of 1939. Without waiting for a surrender ultimatum to expire, 162,000 Italian soldiers swept across the border.

Painfully aware that he was rapidly becoming the junior partner in the Axis pact as Hitler's German Army advanced from victory to victory, Mussolini vowed to impress his Nazi cohort with a rapid, decisive triumph in Greece. On the morning of the invasion, Mussolini proclaimed to Hitler, arriving at the train station in Florence, "Führer, we are on the march!"

The Italian dictator did succeed in impressing Hitler; however, it was not in the way he had intended. While the mountainous terrain of northern Greece hindered the advance with ice and snow making dirt roads virtually impassable, the well-organised and trained Greek Army, under the able command of General Alexandros Papagos, began to exact a tremendous toll in Italian casualties. Only 150,000 strong, the Greeks wrested the initiative from the invaders and were soon mounting a counteroffensive move. The Greeks were adept at mountain fighting, and in early November a force of elite Evzone troops trapped and annihilated an entire Italian division in the Pindus Mountains, killing or capturing more than 13,000 soldiers. By 23 November, Italian forces had been completely ejected from Greek territory.

For Mussolini, the anticipated march to victory rapidly decayed into an embarrassing fight for Italian honour. The Greeks crossed the Albanian frontier and captured 2,000 prisoners in the town of Korytsa at the end of November. Six weeks later, they had occupied at least 25 per cent of Albania with only limited air and naval support from their British allies. When the reorganised Italians struck back in early March, the renewed offensive yet again met with disaster. Over 12,000 Italian troops were lost.

Hitler intercedes

While the Italian nose was bloodied in Greece, Hitler's irritation with the enterprise grew steadily. Contemplating Operation Barbarossa, the colossal Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union that was slated for the spring of 1941, Hitler had counted on a quiet front in the Balkans. By March of that year, Nazi influence was already producing the desired results as satellite countries including Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria had come either grudgingly or enthusiastically into the Axis fold.

"ONLY 150,000 STRONG, THE GREEKS WRESTED THE INITIATIVE FROM THE INVADERS AND WERE SOON MOUNTING A COUNTEROFFENSIVE MOVE"

HEROIC PRIME MINISTER METAXAS

When the Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano delivered an ultimatum to the Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas to surrender in order to avoid invasion, Metaxas replied, "I could not make a decision to sell my own house in a few hours. How do you expect me to sell my country?"

Appointed prime minister by King George II, Metaxas was known for his right-wing beliefs and ruled with the powers of a dictator. In the years prior to World War II, he had dealt swiftly and decisively with political opponents. A committed nationalist, Metaxas was unwilling to forfeit his nation's independence in the face of armed aggression. However, he refused direct aid from Britain fearing that it would antagonise the Germans. Metaxas had actually studied in Germany, was a veteran of the 1897 war with Turkey, and served as chief of the Greek General Staff. He was largely responsible for the efficiency of the Greek military on the eve of war with Italy. Metaxas suffered from diabetes and endured tremendous stress as Greece fought off one enemy and hoped to avoid war with another. He died of a heart attack on 29 January 1941, weeks before the Nazi invasion of his country.



Above: Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas resisted the aggression of Fascist Italy but died before Nazi Germany invaded his country



Mussolini anticipated a quick victory in Greece but was humiliated after Germany was forced to intervene

Mussolini's ill-advised invasion of Greece was ultimately complicating Hitler's grand strategy, and just a week into the Italian fiasco the Germans were preparing for a wider war that even included a bailout of the Italians with an invasion of Greece if completely necessary. Meanwhile, unlike the other Balkan states already targeted by the Nazis, Yugoslavia was recalcitrant. A cooperative government under Prince Paul, the regent of 17-year-old King Peter II, was overthrown in a coup d'etat. The new Yugoslav government then rejected the German domination, and an enraged Hitler vowed to crush such resistance, ordering the military to act with "unmerciful harshness" in destroying Yugoslavia "militarily and as a national unit."

Rapid reprisal in Yugoslavia

On Palm Sunday, 6 April 1941, the full fury of Nazi retribution was visited on the Yugoslav capital of Belgrade. German bombers devastated the city, flying hundreds of sorties over the next three days and inflicting 17,000 civilian casualties. The Yugoslav armed forces were totally unprepared. Virtually all of the air force's 600 planes were destroyed on the ground, while the army, with a million men in uniform, was poorly led and offered only feeble resistance. A combined force of German, Italian, Romanian and Hungarian troops rolled rapidly across the Yugoslav countryside, advancing up to 70 kilometres in just 24 hours. Six days after the invasion began, Belgrade fell to a mere squad of German SS troops under

26-year-old Captain Fritz Klingenberg, who audaciously battled and bluffed their way into the city centre and raised the Nazi flag. By 18 April, organised resistance in Yugoslavia had ended and the upstart government had fled to exile in Great Britain. The 12-day campaign concluded with fewer than 600 Axis soldiers killed or wounded while more than 250,000 Yugoslav prisoners were taken.

Heroic Greek defence

Operation Marita, the German invasion of Greece, coincided with the attack on Yugoslavia. On 6 April, a full 24 infantry and armoured divisions poured across the Greek border from Bulgaria, while German bombers attacked the port city of Piraeus on the outskirts of the capital Athens. The British freighter SS Clan Fraser was hit by German bombs, detonating its load of 250 tonnes of explosives, sinking 11 other small boats in the harbour, and destroying its facilities.

Optimistic following their recent successes against the Italians, Greek troops manned the fortifications of the Metaxas Line in the north and fought the Germans with great determination. The stubborn defenders of Forts Istibey and Kelkagia, two of 21 fortifications that studded the Metaxas Line, were dislodged only after the enemy brought up heavy guns and teams of infantrymen with flamethrowers. German troops attempting to cross the River Nestos, in the northeast, were methodically chewed up, losing more than 700 dead and wounded during 72 hours of heavy combat. In the rugged terrain of the Rupel Pass, a steep valley through which the River Strymon flows to the Aegean Sea, one German regiment lost 25 per cent of its strength.

Advancing westward through Yugoslavia against lighter resistance, the tanks and panzergrenadiers of the German 2nd Panzer Division entered Greece on 8 April and captured Thessaloniki, the country's second-largest city, cutting off 70,000 Greek troops, forcing their surrender, and quickly settling the question of control of eastern Greece.

British and Commonwealth contribution

On the heels of a strategic decision to weaken Allied strength in North Africa, an expeditionary force of 57,000 British and Commonwealth troops began landing in Greece on 7 March. Under the command of Lieutenant General Henry Maitland Wilson, the new arrivals occupied positions in northern Greece



Greek soldiers prepare to attack during their spring offensive against the invading Italians in 1941



Tired and dusty but victorious, German troops and armoured vehicles enter the Greek capital of Athens in May 1941

"A COMBINED FORCE OF GERMAN, ITALIAN, ROMANIAN AND HUNGARIAN TROOPS ROLLED RAPIDLY ACROSS THE YUGOSLAV COUNTRYSIDE, ADVANCING UP TO 70 KILOMETRES IN JUST 24 HOURS"



German troops of the 11th Panzer Division pause for a photographer while crossing the frontier from Bulgaria into Yugoslavia

GERMANY'S REMARKABLE IRON ANNIE

The Junkers Ju-52 transport aircraft was a workhorse of the German military machine throughout World War II. Designed by engineer Ernst Zindel, the trimotor plane first flew in 1930 and prior to the coming of the war served as a civil transport aircraft and passenger airliner that could accommodate 17 people. Like other German aircraft developed in the interwar years, the Ju-52 was easily adapted to wartime service and saw action during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939. Powered by three BMW 132T radial engines generating 715 horsepower each, the plane was capable of a relatively slow top speed of 211 kilometres per hour, making the Ju-52 particularly susceptible to enemy anti-aircraft fire, as was the case during Operation Mercury in the skies above Crete. The Ju-52 carried up to 18 combat-loaded Fallschirmjäger, or paratroopers, 12 stretchers, or a comparable load of supplies. A pilot, co-pilot, and radio operator served as crew, while a single MG 131 13mm machine gun and two MG 15 7.92mm machine guns were installed for defence. Heavy losses were sustained in combat, but nearly 4,900 Ju-52s were manufactured throughout the war and until production ceased in 1952 after a run that spanned three decades.



Above: Trailing a streak of smoke and flames, a Junkers Ju-52 transport plunges earthward during Operation Mercury while others release paratroopers

designated the Aliakmon Line, but within weeks it became clear that the Germans were moving towards Monastir Gap, potentially flanking their positions. After three days of hard fighting – during which the Royal Horse Artillery distinguished itself – British, Australian, and New Zealand troops held the Monastir Gap against repeated German attacks.

Still, the situation was precarious, and the Commonwealth troops withdrew to new positions around Mount Olympus about 440 kilometres from Athens, where they held out until 18 April as German forces advanced around both flanks. Wilson was compelled to order another withdrawal, this time across the mountains to the capital.

By 20 April, Greek forces withdrawn from Albania were cut off and surrendered. As resistance crumbled British and Commonwealth forces executed an evacuation of 51,000 men. During the fighting, the Greeks had lost 70,000 casualties, while the British suffered 900 killed and 1,200 wounded. German casualties amounted to just 4,500. However, Hitler had also lost precious time. The invasion of the Soviet Union was delayed at least five weeks and did not begin until 22 June 1941. Further, for the remainder of the war thousands of German troops were required to occupy Balkan territory and fight an unwinnable war against robust partisan movements.

Operation Mercury

The last component of complete Nazi domination of the Balkans and Greece was the conquest of Crete, a large island in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, 160 kilometres south of the Greek mainland. On 20 May 1941, the Germans initiated Operation Mercury, an airborne invasion of the island. The elite German Fallschirmjäger descended from the skies by glider or parachute, jumping from Junkers Ju-52 transport planes. The Commonwealth defenders shot down 220 of the 500 Ju-52s participating in the operation, and fighting raged across the northern and western portions of the island. Although more than 4,000 Germans were killed or wounded, the invaders eventually gained control of vital airstrips and brought in reinforcements.

By 1 June, the last resistance ended. More than 18,000 Commonwealth troops had been evacuated, while 1,700 were killed and 12,000 captured. The airborne assault on Crete resulted in a Pyrrhic victory for the Germans. Never again did the Nazis mount an airborne operation on such a scale. For the remainder of the war, the Fallschirmjäger fought as elite infantry. The transport aircraft lost during Operation Mercury were sorely missed during subsequent resupply efforts on the Eastern Front, adding to the German misfortune that surrounded a sombre and quite possibly unnecessary victory in the Balkans.

HITLER VERSUS STALIN

OPERATION BARBAROSSA

When World War II's totalitarian titans clashed, Eastern Europe turned red with blood and the Soviet Union was brought to the brink of collapse



War of total annihilation was about to begin. The target of the Nazi wrath was the Soviet Union, the communist powerhouse that dominated from the Baltic Sea to the North Pacific. Since penning *Mein Kampf* in 1925, German dictator Adolf Hitler had made it his mission to supply the German people with the *Lebensraum* – living space – he believed they needed and end what he saw as the creeping evil of Bolshevism, the revolutionary creed that, as he saw it, threatened the fragile German republic of the 1920s. This wasn't just any military campaign – it was a clash between two mutually exclusive ideologies that viewed each other with absolute contempt, two totalitarian dictatorships that ruled through fear and demanded absolute, unthinking obedience, and two all-powerful monsters that commanded their war effort from the highest level. In the spring of 1941, Austrian failed artist Adolf Hitler would break his pact with Georgian bank robber Josef Stalin – and millions would pay for their arrogance.



Walther von Brauchitsch and Adolf Hitler oversee the victory parade of the Wehrmacht in Poland 1939

FROM THE BALTIC TO THE BLACK SEA

Contrary to popular myth, there was no single 'blitzkrieg' doctrine in the German Army – their successes of 1939 and 1940 were built on a mobile warfare doctrine developed after World War I, coupled with a strong professional officer corps and air superiority.

By December 1940, though, Hitler had been seduced by his own propaganda. Convinced the USSR would crumble in the face of a knock-out blow, Führer Directive 21 outlined the plan of what was to become Operation Barbarossa – named for the Holy Roman Emperor who led the Third Crusade. 134 full-strength divisions were committed to the new front under Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch, spread over the continent from Memel in the north to Odessa in the south.

The 1939 German-Soviet non-aggression pact that had carved up Eastern Europe for the two despots was torn up, and Hitler confidently predicted the invasion would take a mere ten weeks. The tactical pre-emptive strike would be fought by the Ostheer on three fronts by Army

Groups North, South and Centre, and aimed to expel all Soviet forces behind the Arkhangelsk-Astrakhan (A-A) Line and take Leningrad, Moscow and Kiev. Army Group Centre, led by WWI veteran Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, would take the same route as Napoleon's ill-fated invasion of Russia 129 years prior.

To ensure the Germans didn't suffer the same fate, General Friedrich Paulus was entrusted with undertaking a strategic survey of the attack zone. Paulus advised encirclement tactics to prevent the Red Army retreating and overstretching German supply lines, locking them into a costly guerrilla war in the Soviet interior. Barbarossa was delayed by over a month as German forces experienced stiffer opposition than expected in the Balkans. The

Yugoslavs in particular put up fierce resistance and Hitler was forced to take over the Italian invasion of Greece. The delay could have given the Kremlin time to rally defences but, despite warnings, Stalin was sure Hitler would not invade until Britain was under German occupation.

The Soviet leader was tipped off as early as December 1940, and was reminded of the threat in a message sent by Winston Churchill in April 1941. Stalin was given one final chance to mobilise his troops on 21 June 1941, the eve of Barbarossa. Wehrmacht Sergeant-Major Alfred Lishof, who had deserted his unit and been taken in by Soviet soldiers, claimed a German attack was imminent. Stalin rebuffed his warnings. He received a rude awakening the next day: the war for the east had begun.

"WE ONLY HAVE TO KICK IN THE DOOR AND THE WHOLE ROTTEN STRUCTURE WILL COME CRASHING DOWN"

HITLER'S PREDICTION FOR JUNE 1941

THE BLOODY PURSUIT OF LEBENSRAUM

HOW THE OSTHEER BLAZED A TRAIL THROUGH THE PLAINS AND CITIES OF EASTERN EUROPE

4. FINNISH ASSISTANCE

10 July

While the Romanians plug away in the south, the Finnish army moves towards the Karelian Isthmus. In total, 300,000 Finnish soldiers join in the fight against the USSR.

1. THE DISTANT RUMBLE OF PANZERS

22 June

Barbarossa gets under way as German armoured divisions race east to deliver what they hope will be a knock-out blow to the unprepared Soviet forces.

LATVIA

LITHUANIA

5. SMOLENSK

16 July

Another important city on the road to Moscow is taken by the Germans. Resistance lasts in the city until 5 August. By 1 September, the frontline has extended as far as Leningrad in the north and the Crimea in the south.

7. OPERATION TYPHOON

2 October

An all-out assault on Moscow begins after much deliberation in the Nazi hierarchy. The Germans manage to fight their way to the capital's suburbs but ultimately fail to take the city as winter sets in.

9. WINTER TAKES HOLD

5 December

Horrendous weather conditions and fresh Soviet recruits take their toll on the exhausted Wehrmacht, which has no alternative but to turn back. Operation Barbarossa has failed in its objectives, however, Eastern Europe has fallen under the shadow of the Greater German Reich.

3. MORE CITIES FALL

3 July

The onslaught continues as Volkovsk and then Minsk are both taken as German forces encircle the Red Army and take 324,000 prisoners.

BYELORUSSIA

GERMANY

U S S R

HUNGARY

UKRAINE

2. ROMANIAN ALLIES

22 June

It isn't just the Wehrmacht ploughing east as two allied Romanian armies press into Ukraine heading for the city of Odessa.

ROMANIA

6. THE TAKING OF KIEV

16 September

The capital of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic is the next settlement to fall as Soviet troops are trapped in a pocket east of the city. A month later, the Wehrmacht have advanced even further to Bryansk and Belgorod.

8. SIEGE OF SEVASTOPOL

16 November

Crimea falls into the hands of the Germans after a lengthy siege that eventually results in an Axis victory. The area will be used as a launch pad for the drive to the oil fields of the Caucasus in Operation Blue.

KEY

-  GERMAN ADVANCE
-  SOVIET COUNTERATTACK
-  SURROUNDED SOVIET FORCES
-  GERMAN TROOPS
-  SOVIET TROOPS

Steel helmet

The German Army's distinctive steel helmet, or Stahlhelm, was adopted during World War I and later modified numerous times. Its coal scuttle appearance came to symbolise Nazi brutality in Europe.

Mauser rifle

This German soldier carries the iconic bolt-action Mauser Karabiner 98 kurz, or K98k, firing a 7.92mm cartridge. The K98k was the standard-issue Wehrmacht infantry rifle during World War II.

Winter gear

This German soldier is fortunate to have an overcoat, heavy boots and gloves to protect against the Russian winter. Many German soldiers on the Eastern Front had only their summer uniforms.

Mess kit

The German soldier carried his mess kit and bread bag attached to Y-straps or D-ring loops on leather belts. As Barbarossa wore on, hot food was served less frequently in the field.

HITLER'S ARMoured STORM

The ill-prepared Red Army and the fury of the oncoming assault was a lethal cocktail for the USSR. Stalin's purges of generals had put his forces at a severe disadvantage and the troops were growing weary of constant supervision by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD). The Soviets may have had up to three times the number of tanks and aircraft as the Third Reich but they were widely dispersed across the vast country, lacked strong command and suffered from obsolete technology. The first major engagement of the Baltic front was the Battle of Raseiniai beginning on 23 June. The attack included a huge bombardment from both ground artillery and the Luftwaffe, which crippled Soviet airfields, seeing the Soviet Air Forces lose 25 per cent of its strength. Mechanised divisions covered up to 80 kilometres a day as the front went further eastwards, while the infantry was behind them, yomping 30 kilometres a day. Encircling the shell-shocked Soviets was paying off as pincer movements accounted for hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war. In early July, Białystok and Minsk also fell as the Red Army retreated from Belarus to the banks of the Dnieper River. The Wehrmacht exerted technical and tactical dominance, with 750 German armoured vehicles crushing 3,500 Soviet armoured vehicles at the Battle of Brody between 23-30 June.

"WHAT INDIA WAS FOR ENGLAND THE TERRITORIES OF RUSSIA WILL BE FOR US... THE GERMAN COLONISTS OUGHT TO LIVE ON HANDSOME, SPACIOUS FARMS"

HITLER ON HIS PLANS FOR THE LEBENSRAUM

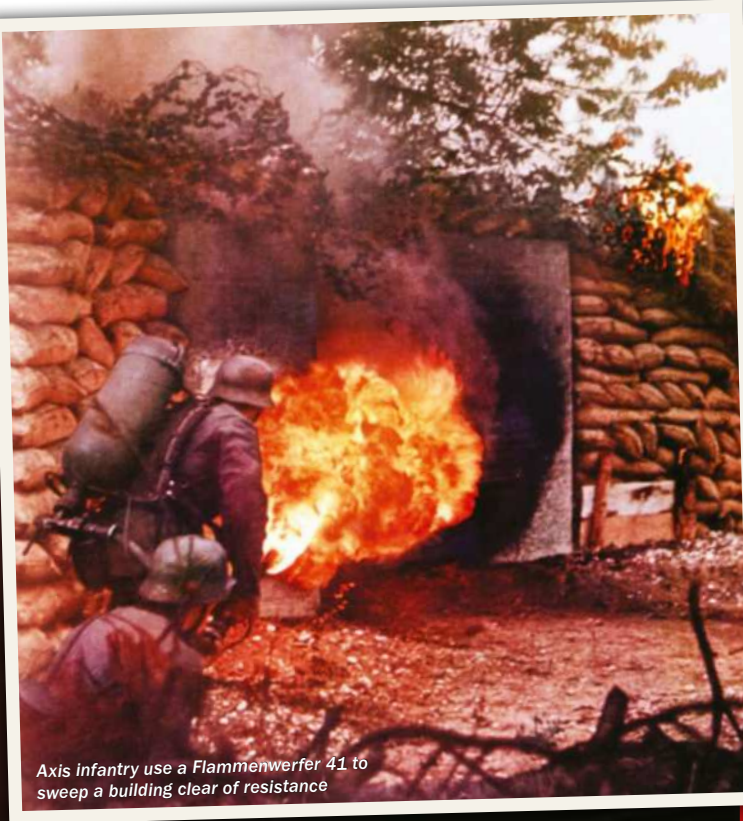


WEHRMACHT SOLDIER

THE BATTLE-HARDENED SOLDIERS OF THE GERMAN WEHRMACHT KNEW ONLY VICTORY UNTIL THEY INVADED SOVIET RUSSIA

German troops enter Russia during the early stages of the invasion, June 1941





Axis infantry use a Flammenwerfer 41 to sweep a building clear of resistance

“BURNING VILLAGES, STARING BODIES OF FALLEN RUSSIAN SOLDIERS, SWOLLEN CARCASSES OF DEAD HORSES, RUSTING, BLACKENED AND BURNT-OUT TANKS WERE THE SIGNS OF THE MARCH”

A GERMAN INFANTRYMAN DESCRIBES THE EARLY DAYS OF BARBAROSSA

July saw torrential rain drench the battlefields of eastern Europe. It was so severe that the free-roaming Ostheer had been stopped in its tracks and columns of troops tailed back tens of kilometres waiting for the Sun to emerge from the clouds. This gave the beleaguered Red Army a chance to rediscover its composure. The reaction was a counterattack but the Wehrmacht stood firm, beating the Soviets back and advancing ever further towards Smolensk, which fell after a month of heavy fighting. The Germans were suffering substantial losses now but the Wehrmacht juggernaut just kept on coming. Stalin ordered a strict scorched-earth policy. All across the Eastern Front bridges were destroyed, railway lines were sabotaged and roads were demolished. Strong resistance was now a must as the Ostheer drew ever nearer to the cradle of Soviet power. Stalin didn't tolerate failure and General Dmitry Pavlov was duly executed for his failure to prevent the German advance. Now his commanders were much more hesitant to surrender or retreat. While Stalin was purging the Red Army from the top down, the Wehrmacht was busy pillaging the population of Minsk.

Winter uniform

Unlike his German adversary, the Red Army soldier was outfitted for winter warfare with a quilted coat and trousers, fur-lined gloves and thick boots that provided warmth in below-freezing temperatures.

DP-28 light machine gun

With its large drum magazine, the DP-28 light machine gun earned the nickname 'the record player'. Firing a 7.62mm round, it provided automatic weapons support at the squad level.



Winter headgear

Rather than wearing a heavy steel helmet, this Red Army soldier takes advantage of the warmth of a wool, fur-lined cap that offers protection for his ears against the bitter Russian winter.

Additional accoutrements

This Red Army soldier has placed his garrison cap inside his wide canvas belt, while additional equipment and ammunition for other weapons are carried in attached pouches.



RED ARMY SOLDIER

AFTER SUFFERING HORRIBLE LOSSES, THE RESILIENT RED ARMY SOLDIER PROVED MORE THAN A MATCH FOR THE NAZI INVADERS

THE HOLOCAUST IN THE EAST

As the front kept expanding, Hitler's vision for an ethnically 'pure' Lebensraum was beginning to be realised behind the lines. Following in the infantry's tracks was the Einsatzgruppen – paramilitary death squads under the command of the SS. They systematically murdered Jews, communist officials and intelligentsia, and Romani and Sinti Gypsies in mass shootings, public hangings and gas trucks, which used the exhaust emissions from motors to choke their victims.

Concentration camps and ghettos were also established, and their inmates used as slave labour. Some of the Wehrmacht command had misgivings but this didn't stop it, and many regular army units, police units, locally raised auxiliaries and fascist militia were complicit in the bloodletting. One of the largest of the mass murders was at Babi Yar on the outskirts of Kiev in September 1941. SS records report a total of 600,000 killed in 1941 alone and the terror outlasted Barbarossa with up to 2 million people being killed by the Einsatzgruppen between 1941 and 1944.

After the close of hostilities, 24 former Einsatzgruppen commanders were charged with crimes against humanity at the Einsatzgruppen Trial, from 1947-48. 14 received death sentences and two received life sentences. The others were given lesser sentences. The ultimate architects of the system, Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler and SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, both met justice – the former committed suicide in his prison cell while the latter was assassinated in Prague by Allied agents.

“IS IT POSSIBLE THE INVADERS NO LONGER REGARD US AS HUMAN AND BRAND US LIKE CATTLE? ONE CAN NOT ACCEPT SUCH MEANNESS. BUT WHO DARES OPPOSE THEM?”

VILNA RESIDENT MACHA ROLNIKAS WRITING IN HER DIARY IN JUNE 1941

Main weapon

The T-34 medium tank was initially armed with a high-velocity 76.2mm cannon, later upgunned to an 85mm weapon.

Sloped armour

The sloped armour plating of the T-34 added to its protective qualities without increasing the thickness of the armour itself.

Secondary armament

For defence against enemy infantry, the T-34 mounted a pair of 7.62mm machine guns in the turret and hull.

Driver position

The driver steered the T-34 by pulling either of two tillers located on each side of his seat.

THE ADVANCE FALTERS

The first phase of Barbarossa was over and Hitler and his generals now had to make a judgement call. There were three possible routes that lay ahead: drive on to Moscow, venture north to conquer the birthplace of communism, Leningrad, or turn south and head for the USSR's breadbasket, Ukraine. Hitler, overruling his generals in the process, opted for the latter, reasoning that the oil fields of Baku and the Soviet industry hub at Kharkov were a priority. This would weaken the attacking thrust on Moscow, but the Führer, still completely convinced of his talent as a war leader, believed he knew best. The disagreements rumbled on for the majority of August, as valuable time to completely crush the Soviets was lost. This respite was just what the Red Army needed. By the middle of August, 200 fresh divisions had been brought west, and even if the Germans continued to outthink the Soviets, they would

not outnumber them. Despite the oncoming numerical advantage, the ensuing Battle of Kiev was the biggest defeat ever felt by the Red Army in history, and as the Germans took the Uman Pocket, things weren't getting better up north either. The symbolic city of Leningrad had been besieged from mid-September and 300 civilians were dying every day in the former Russian capital, where starvation had seen the population resort to eating cats, dogs and birds. There were even reports of cannibalism.



Cramped interior

The interior of the T-34 was not ergonomically ideal as its crew operated in cramped positions for extended periods.

Turret

The compact two-man turret of the early T-34 required the commander to aim the main gun, reducing combat efficiency.

Wide tracks

The T-34's wide tracks provided stability to the tank's chassis and improved cross-country performance, particularly in snow or muddy terrain.

Suspension system

American Walter Christie designed the suspension system of the T-34, which was common among Soviet tanks of World War II.

Engine

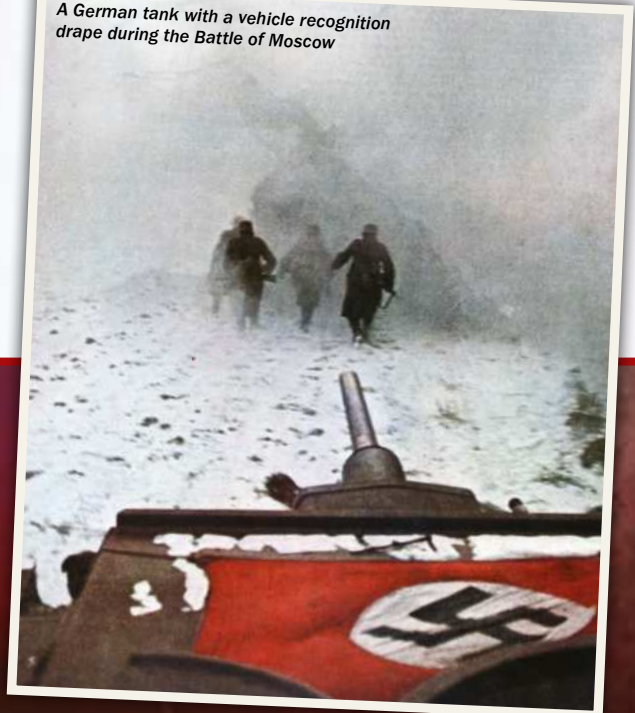
The T-34 was powered by a V-2-34 V-12 diesel engine generating 500 horsepower and a top speed of 53 kilometres per hour.



RED ARMY WORKHORSE

THE SOVIET T-34 IS THOUGHT TO BE THE MOST FORMIDABLE TANK OF WORLD WAR II

A German tank with a vehicle recognition drape during the Battle of Moscow



OPERATION TYPHOON

After the successes in both the north and south, it was time for the Ostheer to deliver the killing blow: Moscow. The assault got under way in October as Vyazma, a town 200 kilometres south of Moscow, was taken. The victories just kept coming as Kalinin and Bryansk also fell. Moscow was nearing.

In the city, the scene was one of panic. Two million people had fled the capital and the Soviet government had been relocated to Kuybyshev (now Samara) 800 kilometres to the east. One man who didn't quake in his boots was Georgy Zhukov. With Imperial Japan no longer posing a threat to the Soviet Far East – thanks in part

to his critical victory at Khalkhin Gol in 1939 – he mobilised 900,000 recruits from the eastern military districts to combat the Germans in the west. The Ostheer were just 65 kilometres from the gates of Moscow and could see the light of anti-aircraft fire over the city, but they were unable to advance any further. The Soviet strategy was now to attack the energy-sapped and sleep-deprived Germans as much as possible, using the fresh troops, with adverse weather giving the Red Army plenty of time to regroup and consolidate its positions. Now a long way from Berlin, German intelligence

began to falter. High Command severely underestimated the amount of troops the USSR could call on and their prediction of 50 reserve Red Army divisions was woefully inadequate. By mid-November, the Rasputitsa autumn rains had ceased and the muddy quagmire had hardened, allowing large-scale offensives to recommence. The Germans were now in Moscow's suburbs and could see the Kremlin. The heat of battle was fierce as the Red Army fought tooth and nail for the salvation of their capital. Something had to give, and it did, as the coldest winter for 140 years gripped the Soviet Union.

“FOR ALL MILITARY PURPOSES, SOVIET RUSSIA IS DONE WITH. THE BRITISH DREAM OF A TWO-FRONT WAR IS DEAD”

COMMANDER OF THE FIRST SS PANZER DIVISION, SEPP DIETRICH, 9 OCTOBER 1941



A Wehrmacht soldier keeps an eye out for unexpected Russian attacks

GENERAL FROST

The Soviets were prepared for the sub-zero temperatures, equipped with padded winter clothing and specialist units – including ski troops and sleds for transporting guns and artillery. The Germans, meanwhile, had nothing of the sort. Hitler's confidence of a swift victory meant that few of the soldiers had winter clothing to keep the frost at bay and the results were devastating. Guns jammed and gloved fingers struggled to work them loose, rations froze with stews turning to hunks of ice, engines seized up for want of antifreeze, and intense blizzards grounded the Luftwaffe. The frostbite was so bad that 14,000 soldiers had their limbs amputated and the Ostheer's supply train, which was overly dependent on horses, was crippled. The Red Army counterattack on 5 December hit hard as 88 Soviet divisions

ploughed into German lines over an 800-kilometre front. This crushed the resolve of the already weary Germans but Hitler was not one to admit defeat and ordered von Bock to hold his ground. The decision was pigheaded at best and represented the Führer's overconfidence as a general. The Red Army advance initiated a series of losses for the Wehrmacht, enraging Hitler. Von Rundstedt, von Brauchitsch and von Bock were all relieved of their duties as Hitler shuffled his pack. Günther von Kluge was promoted to field marshal while Hitler himself took over as supreme commander. The changes didn't have the desired effect and a tactical retreat was ordered as the panzer divisions withdrew 322 kilometres west to the starting place of Operation Typhoon. Barbarossa had failed.

“THE WIND STABS YOU IN THE FACE WITH NEEDLES AND BLASTS THROUGH YOUR PROTECTIVE HEADGEAR AND YOUR GLOVES. YOUR EYES ARE STREAMING SO MUCH YOU CAN HARDLY SEE A THING”

WEHRMACHT GENERAL GOTTHARD HEINRICI ON THE HARSH CONDITIONS

THE LAKE LADOGA LIFELINE

Hitler coveted Leningrad as it was the symbolic centre of communism – the heart of the October Revolution of 1917 – and its successful invasion would be an ideological victory. Rail and land connections to the rest of the USSR were severed on 30 August as Nazi command decided to besiege the city. The only chance for Leningrad lay in Lake Ladoga, which was already providing a natural barrier, dividing German and Finnish co-belligerents. The lake froze over in November 1941 allowing lorries to transport supplies into the city, providing relief. The incoming resources from the ice road weren't enough to completely sustain the city but the natural highway helped keep the city alive until it was liberated in January 1944 after more than 900 days of siege.



Below: For its citizens' immense bravery and stamina, Leningrad was named a hero city by the Soviet government in 1945



BARBAROSSA GENERALS



THE OPPOSING GERMAN AND SOVIET COMMANDERS COMMITTED MILLIONS OF MEN AND VAST RESOURCES TO ONE OF THE LARGEST CLASHES OF ARMS THE WORLD HAD EVER SEEN



ADOLF HITLER

As early as the 1920s, Hitler made public his vision for the German people to find Lebensraum, or living space, in the east. Believing that Russia could not withstand the Nazi onslaught, the Führer launched Operation Barbarossa. It was a decision that would doom the Third Reich.



WALTHER VON BRAUCHITSCH

Commander in chief of the German Army during the early years of WWII, Field Marshal von Brauchitsch supported Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union. However, von Brauchitsch fell into disfavor when German forces failed to capture Moscow.



FEDOR VON BOCK

Field Marshal Fedor von Bock commanded Army Group Centre during Barbarossa. He opposed Hitler's alterations to the original Wehrmacht plan to drive directly against Moscow rather than attempting encirclements of Red Army troops and capturing Minsk and other cities prior to the advance on the capital.



JOSEF STALIN

After the nations signed a non-aggression pact in 1939 and co-operated during the invasion of Poland, Premier Josef Stalin naively refused to believe intelligence reports suggesting that Hitler and the Nazi war machine were preparing to invade the Soviet Union on a front more than 1,600 kilometres long.



GEORGY ZHUKOV

Although his earliest counteroffensive operations against the invading German Army ended in failure, Marshal Georgy Zhukov remained a central figure in the Red Army effort to stem the Nazi tide and in the eventual victory during the Great Patriotic War, as the Soviets called World War II.



ALEKSANDR VASILEVSKY

A high-ranking member of the Red Army general staff, Marshal Vasilevsky was responsible for planning much of the defensive effort around Moscow in the autumn of 1941 as well as many aspects of the Soviet counteroffensive that ultimately led to victory.

GERMANY'S ALLIES

THE SMALLER NATIONS THROWN INTO THE MEAT GRINDER BETWEEN HITLER AND STALIN



FINLAND

Finland had been embroiled in border disputes with the Soviet Union prior to Barbarossa. The two nations had been battling it out on the Karelian Isthmus since 1939 and Hitler saw the chance for an alliance. On the same day as Barbarossa, the Finnish Army, although not technically part of the Axis, began an assault on the Isthmus north of Leningrad. Even after Barbarossa ended, the Continuation War lasted until 1944.



ROMANIA

Hitler was keen for an alliance with Romania as it granted him access to extra oil reserves and the second largest contribution of troops to Barbarossa. The troops joined up with Army Group South but found their ability in battle was often castigated by Wehrmacht generals. Regardless, they were instrumental in the push on Odessa and the Crimea, but when the USSR pushed west, the Romanian Army was in no position to resist.



ITALY

After the joint invasion of Greece and the Balkans, Mussolini was keen to assist his German ally. An expeditionary force of 62,000 troops was raised but, like the Germans, they were unprepared for the frozen climate. The Italian Eighth Army supported the Wehrmacht throughout the campaign but turned out to be no match for the Red Army. Tens of thousands of POWs were captured to suffer in Soviet prison camps.



HUNGARY

Linked to Germany through their alliance with the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hungary was given territory in Romania and Yugoslavia as a way of goading them into the war. Despite this, the Hungarians were hesitant to commit soldiers and contributed less than other Axis states. Their sudden capitulation in 1944 in the face of the Red Army advance saw Hitler install a puppet regime to try to stymie the Soviet fight back.



SLOVAK REPUBLIC

The Slovak Republic was established in 1939 as a client state to Nazi Germany. As a puppet state, it was forced to submit to German direction. The Slovakian Expeditionary Army Group sent 45,000 men to aid the Wehrmacht but could not keep up as it lacked vehicles to match the fast-moving panzer formations. Their morale declined as the war went on so the majority of its divisions were turned into purely construction battalions.

**"THEY ARE EVERYWHERE PUSHING THROUGH
THE WIDE GAPS THAT HAVE OPENED UP IN
OUR FRONT. THE RETREAT IN SNOW AND ICE IS
ABSOLUTELY NAPOLEONIC IN ITS MANNER. THE
LOSSES ARE THE SAME"**

GENERAL GOTTHARD HEINRICI, WHO
SERVED IN THE FOURTH ARMY UNDER VON
KLUGE, 22 DECEMBER 1941



ПРИ ГОДА ВОЙНЫ

WHY HITLER LOST

Despite the Nazi war machine's initial victories as the armoured spearheads of Operation Barbarossa struck deep across the expanse of Russia, killing or capturing millions of Red Army soldiers, Adolf Hitler had failed to reckon with several salient points that condemned the Wehrmacht to defence, decline and defeat on the Eastern Front.

Expecting a rapid advance to victory, Hitler underestimated the resolve of his communist enemy and the steely, ruthless determination of Josef Stalin once the Soviet Union was plunged into war. As the Germans marched from victory to victory, overconfidence gripped the Führer and his senior commanders. However, by the autumn of 1941, the situation had begun to take on a different character. While Hitler meddled with the conduct of the offensive both strategically and tactically, Red Army counterattacks and then seemingly endless rain, mud and snow combined to slow the

Nazi tide. For the German soldier, an ill wind blew across Russia with the winter of 1941. Often with nothing more substantial than their summer uniforms to protect against the bitter cold, men were incapacitated or simply froze to death. Engines and weapons became inoperable. A mechanised army ground to a chilling halt. Panzer commanders peered through field glasses at the domes of Moscow fewer than 20 kilometres away.

When Hitler turned his tanks towards Stalingrad and the oil fields of the Caucasus the following summer, only death and destruction awaited his Sixth Army and the once seemingly invincible Wehrmacht formations. Eventually an inexorable wave of Soviet retribution roared across Eastern Europe and into the streets of Berlin. On the Eastern Front, Hitler's reach had exceeded his grasp, revealing the Führer's destiny to die, along with his dream of world domination, amid the rubble of his capital city.

THE SHEER SCALE OF OPERATION BARBAROSSA

134+73
DIVISIONS at full fighting strength
DIVISIONS for deployment behind the front



3.5 MILLION
GERMAN TROOPS

50,000
SLOVAKIAN TROOPS



300,000 FINNS



1 MILLION GERMAN ALLIED TROOPS



250,000
ROMANIANS

THE GERMANS HAD



3,580 TANKS



2,700 AIRCRAFT



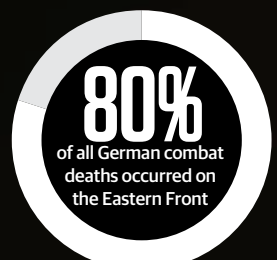
500,000 TRUCKS



7,184 GUNS

The capture of Kiev took

665,000
PRISONERS
884 TANKS
3,000 GUNS



EXTRA THE STARS AND STRIPES EXTRA
Daily Newspaper of U.S. Armed Forces in the European Theater of Operations
Vol. 1—No. 279 11c. Wednesday, May 2, 1945

HITLER DEAD

Fuehrer Fell at CP, German Radio Says; Doenitz at Helm, Vows War Will Continue

German radio announced last night that Adolf Hitler had died. After Karl Doenitz, former commander-in-chief of the German Navy, had succeeded him as ruler of the Reich, the radio announced news said.

Doenitz made a radio speech immediately after the announcement, Hitler said, and declared that Germany would continue its struggle. His statement spelled peace efforts which had been pursued for more than a week in all world capitals.

Churchill Hints Peace Is at Hand

Winston Churchill, British prime minister, said last night that the news of Hitler's death was a "great relief" and that it was "a step towards peace." He said that the British government was "ready to play a constructive part in the peace negotiations."



The announcement did not give any details of how the Reich leader died. The news was broadcast after a solemn Wagnerian music, including the "Eulogie of the Gods," was played.

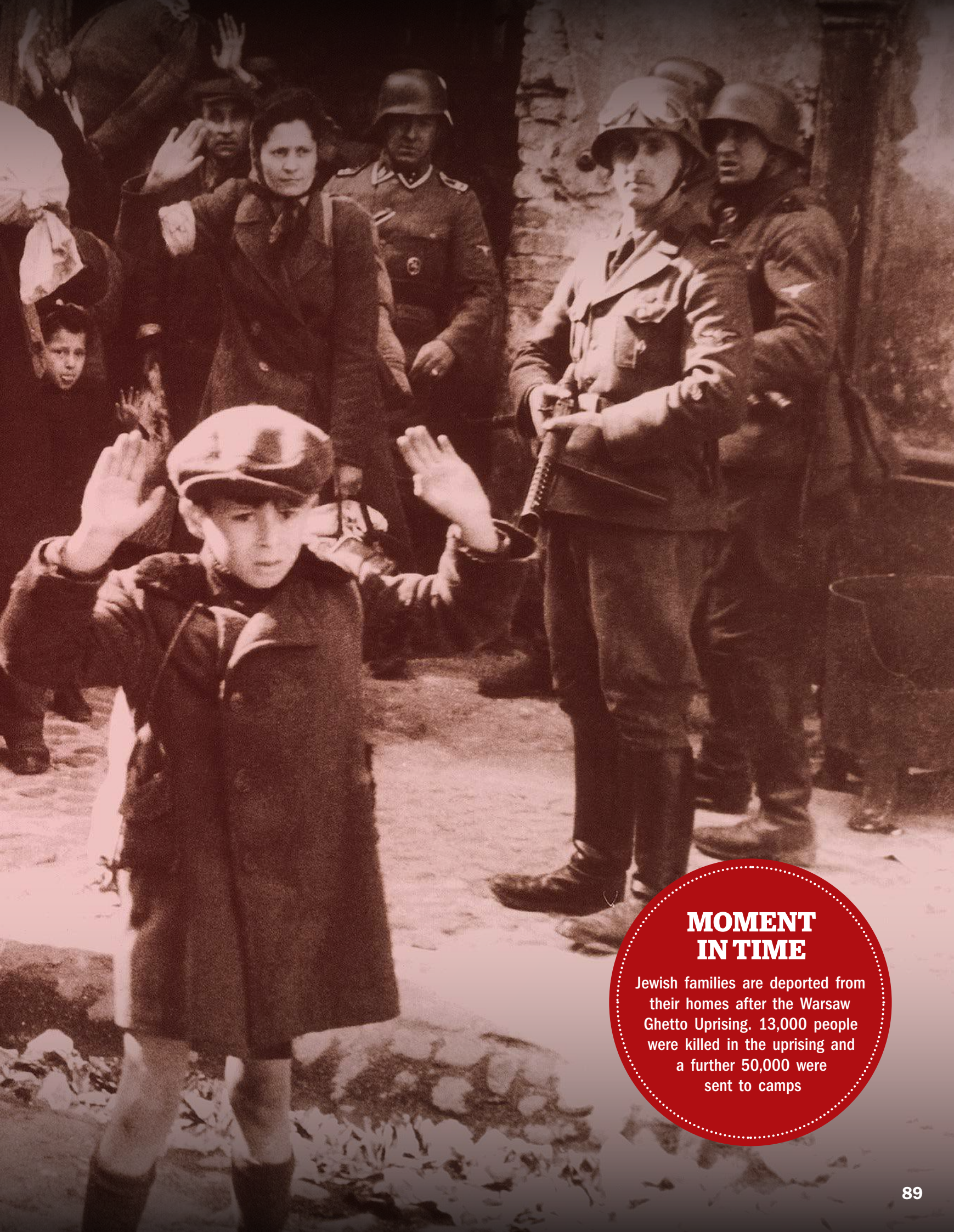
"Fuehrer, adieu," a voice said. "In a few minutes you will hear a solemn and important message to the German people. We are now going to play a broadcast of an important speech by Doenitz."

Hitler's death came three days after his capture in Germany. He was killed by British soldiers near the village of Oberhofen, near Lake Geneva.

Doenitz, in his speech, said that Hitler "had fallen as he commanded me," while the Fuehrer's body was being taken to the British.

A special edition of The Stars and Stripes, a newspaper for US soldiers, reports on Hitler's death



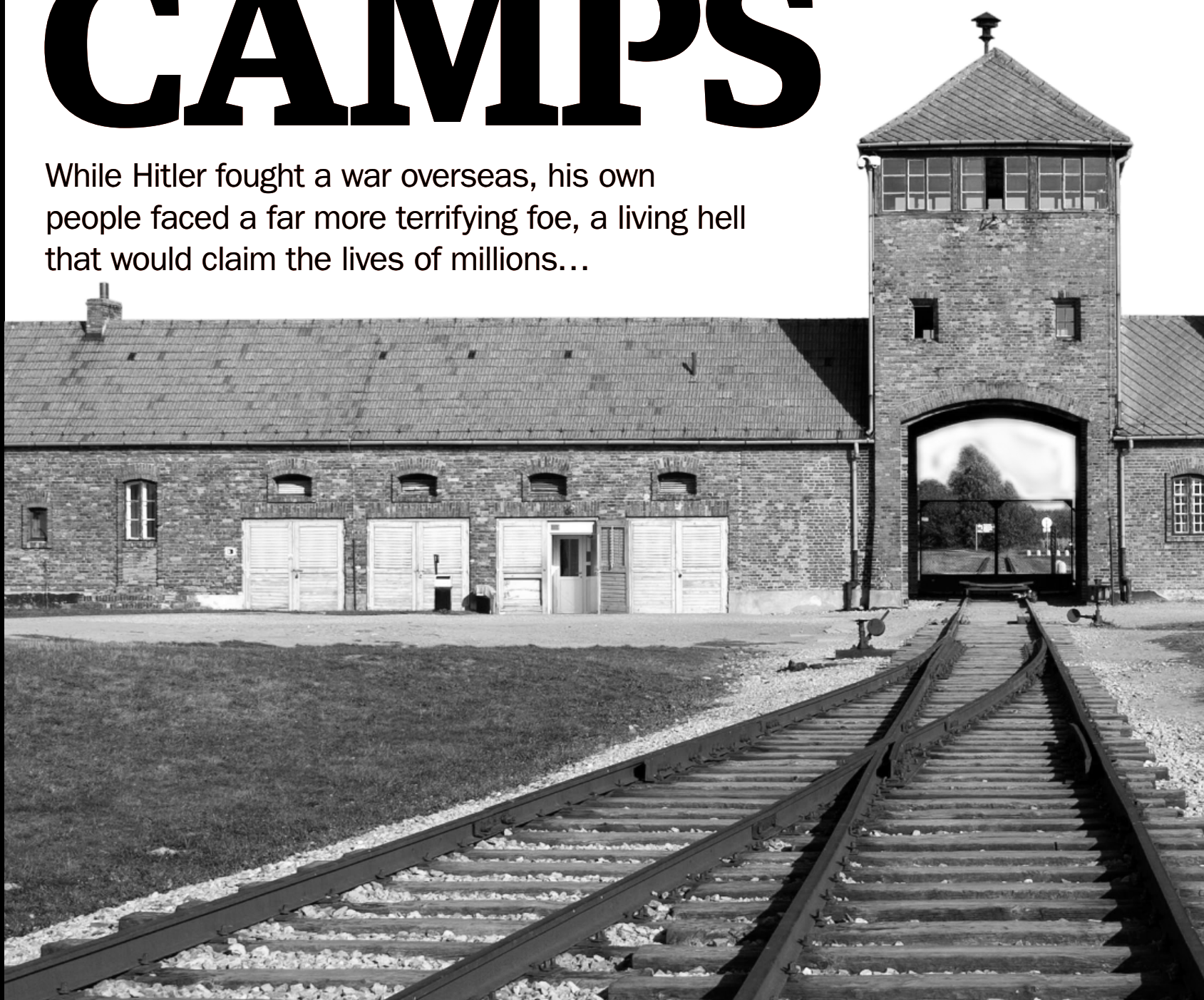


MOMENT IN TIME

Jewish families are deported from their homes after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. 13,000 people were killed in the uprising and a further 50,000 were sent to camps

HITLER'S DEATH CAMPS

While Hitler fought a war overseas, his own people faced a far more terrifying foe, a living hell that would claim the lives of millions...



Since 1945, more than 44 million people from the furthest reaches of the planet have visited Auschwitz. A sombre, silent world of barbed wire, railway sidings, cold barracks and a dirty, rusted crematorium, Auschwitz today stands as a well preserved memory of everything that occurred there. It is an uncomfortable memory, one the majority would like to forget, yet is vital that all remember. At the time, Auschwitz was only one of many, but today it serves as a symbol of extermination, a warning of the darkest reaches of evil, and a reminder to, at all costs, avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

Concentration camps, or variations of them, were a constant part of Hitler's rule. The very first camps were created as soon as Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany in 1933. These detainment camps were intended for political opponents of the Nazi Party. By ridding himself of anyone he believed to be a threat by throwing them in these camps, Hitler was able to consolidate power and rule largely unopposed. Due to the growing number of people arrested, more camps were needed and were built throughout Germany. By 1934, the camps were controlled by one central administration, and by the end of that year the SS were the only agency with the authority to run them. By the time Germany invaded Poland in 1939 there were six of these camps. Although they involved imprisonment and forced labour, they did not yet carry out the brutal task for which they would one day become infamous – mass murder.

Hitler's plan to eliminate the Jewish population, the Final Solution, did not occur overnight. Instead the process of dehumanisation began very early in his rule. He introduced the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, which made it illegal for Germans to marry or have sex with Jews. The laws also took away the Jews' German citizenship, and most of their rights. Propaganda films were pumped out to convince the population of their immortality, and how the Jews' genetic makeup defined them as parasites. In 1938, the 'Night of Broken Glass' saw Nazis looting and burning synagogues, hospitals, schools, homes and Jewish businesses all over Germany. Jews were expelled from their homes and forced into ghettos. By this stage most regarded Jews as subhuman, and the Jews were terrified into submission by the brutality they had experienced. Afraid, alone and with no rights, it was the perfect storm for Hitler to execute his Final Solution.

The camps specifically designed for extermination were built after the Wannsee Conference in early 1942, where the goal of exterminating all Jews was decided upon, and was given the name Operation Reinhard. Responsibility for executing this fell to Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi lieutenant colonel who had arranged the movement of Jews into ghettos. Three centres designed primarily for killing were established in Poland: Belzec, Sobibór and Treblinka. Auschwitz II was also designed as an extermination camp.

Auschwitz was by far the biggest and most organised of the camps. It comprised three

“HITLER'S PLAN TO ELIMINATE THE JEWISH POPULATION, DID NOT OCCUR OVERNIGHT. INSTEAD THE PROCESS OF DEHUMANISATION BEGAN VERY EARLY IN HIS RULE”

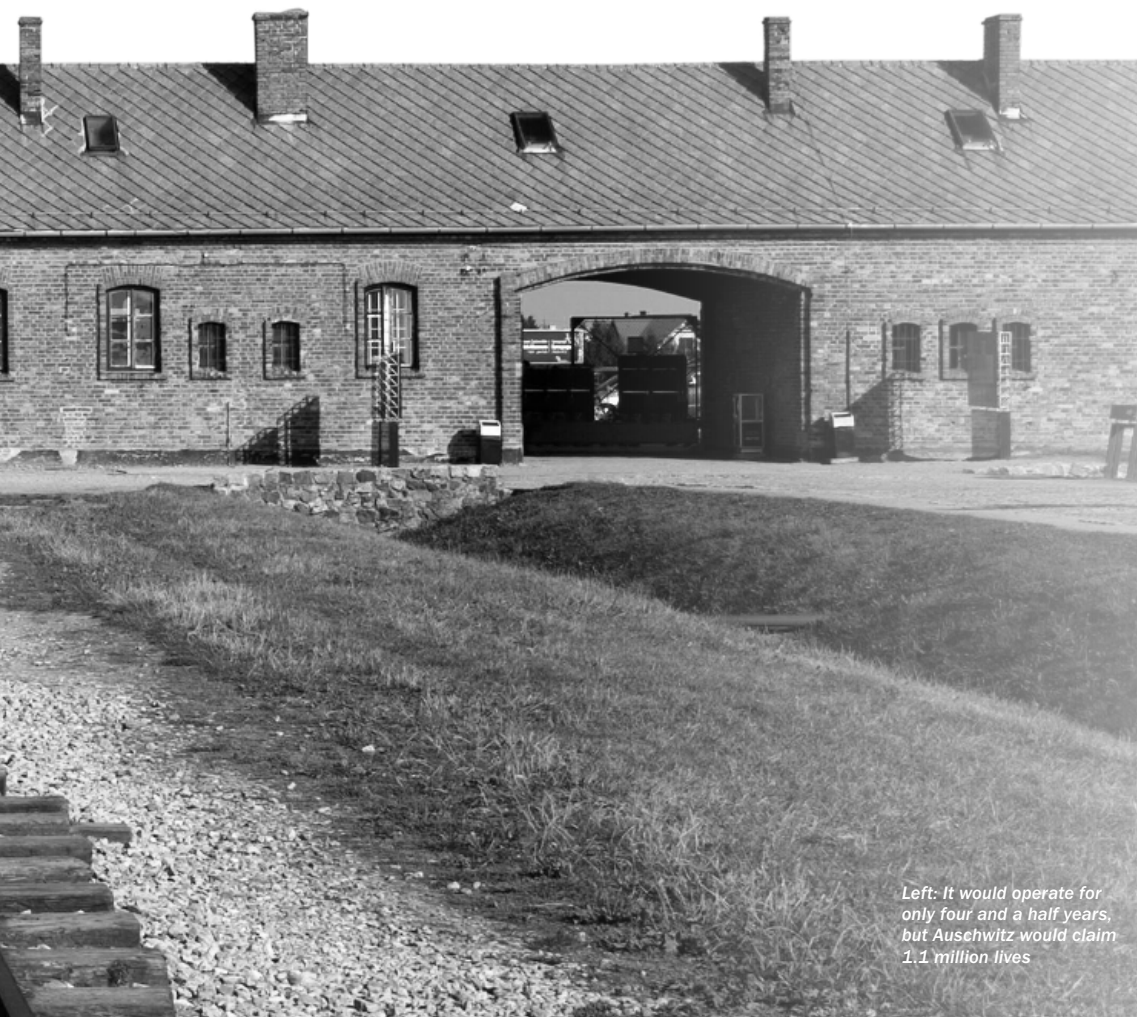
NAZI EXPERIMENTS

Another horrific aspect of the death camps was human experimentation. Many doctors and physicians were drawn by the chance to conduct twisted experiments that would not usually be permitted, and the fate of many of their patients was worse than death. Some of the experiments would involve exposing the body to extreme conditions like freezing temperatures or atmospheric pressure, just to see how they would react. Healthy inmates were infected with diseases such as malaria or tuberculosis in order to test immunisation methods. Another experiment concerned blood clotting, where the subjects were given a substance to see how it would affect it, then were shot through the chest or neck, or even had their limbs amputated without anaesthesia.

Other experiments seemed to only satisfy the doctors' sick desires. Josef Mengele, for example, was fascinated with twins and he would conduct horrific acts upon them, such as sewing four-year-old twins together in order to make them conjoined, their suffering was only ended by their parents managing to sneak them morphine to kill them. Known as the 'Angel of Death' Mengele would trick the children into trusting them by giving them sweets and toys before maiming, paralysing and murdering them. In one particularly horrific experiment, nursing babies were taken from their mothers just to see how long they could survive without feeding. As far as the doctors were concerned, the concentration camps not only gave them free rein to conduct their experiments, but also provided a constant, ample supply of subjects who couldn't say no.



Above: These Jewish twins were some of the few children to survive Auschwitz, as they were kept alive for Mengele's experiments



Left: It would operate for only four and a half years, but Auschwitz would claim 1.1 million lives

separate camps, a death camp, Birkenau, a forced labour camp and a concentration camp. Covering over 30.5 square kilometres it was guarded by approximately 6,000 men and would go on to claim more than 1.25 million lives. The huge killing centre at Birkenau was the largest of the Nazi system, and served as the centrepiece of the extermination. There were several pure death camps that were, by comparison, quite small at only a few hundred metres long, and designed for quick and 'efficient' killing. Treblinka, for example, was located in sparsely populated woodland, the perfect place for concealing murders.

The first trains carrying prisoners arrived in Birkenau in March 1942. However, the trauma began long before the prisoners arrived. The

journey consisted of the men, women and children being forced to travel in cramped windowless cattle wagons, some so packed there was only room to stand. There was no water, food, toilet facilities or even ventilation. Perhaps worst of all was the lack of control, the prisoners had no idea where they were going, or how long the traumatic journey would last. Many people died of starvation or suffocation before they even reached the camp, and those still alive were forced to share their wagons with rotting corpses. The longest journey lasted a horrific 18 days, and when the doors were opened the SS discovered piles of lifeless bodies.

Those who arrived at the death camps were told it was a holding facility and they would

continue their journey soon. In fact, the only prisoners that survived these camps were the 'lucky' few able-bodied selected to remove and bury the corpses killed in the gas chambers. At all camps, the people were forced to leave their belongings and were gathered outside for a selection process. First, they were divided by gender and then an SS guard would assess their fitness. Small children, pregnant women, the sick and handicapped were the first to be condemned to death. The Nazis had little use for them, as they could not labour in the camps. Most women with small children were also given a death sentence, as separating them would have caused a commotion, and above anything the camp runners wished to maintain the order and efficiency of their operation. Those who were over 14 and were deemed 'fit' for work were sent to the other side of the loading ramp, almost always this involved splitting up families who had no idea they would never see their loved ones again.

The Nazis were very concerned with achieving the most efficient killing process. They had conducted multiple experiments and lots of research into determining the most effective way of dispatching their victims; one that would ensure everyone died, that nobody escaped, and that nobody would realise what was happening until it was too late. The method they eventually settled on in most of the camps was gassing. While carbon monoxide was originally used, the insecticide Zyklon B was developed and found to be more effective. To maintain the façade of safety, the victims were told to undress to be 'washed and disinfected', and often Jewish prisoners were used as part of this process, helping their kinsmen to undress to calm their nerves.



Jewish women in Budapest captured and escorted away. A tenth of the Jewish victims were Hungarian



Cargo trains were used to transport victims to the death camps. Many didn't survive the journey



Above: Jews were required to identify themselves by wearing a yellow star in public, this was part of the process of dehumanisation

Above left: This photo shows the crematorium at the German concentration camp Weimar, bones of anti-Nazi German women can still be seen within

Left: If a person was sent to the right in the selection it meant they would live as a labourer, the left was a death sentence, though the victim did not know it



“GRIM, PROLONGED SUFFERING AWAITED. THE FIT INMATES WOULD BE COMPLETELY UNDRESSED, THEN SHAVED OF THEIR BODY HAIR AND TATTOOED WITH THE NOW-INFAMOUS REGISTRATION NUMBERS”

Any children that cried were comforted by a ‘Special Detachment’ team of Jewish people, and there were many reports of children walking into the chambers laughing and singing as they clutched their toys. Notices such as ‘Cleanliness brings freedom!’ were hung above the chamber doors, and SS men dressed as doctors even examined the victims before the gassing. However, this was only to mark the prisoners who had gold teeth which they could later extract.

The doors were sealed and the gas would enter the chamber via pellets of Zyklon B which were dropped into vents. The gas would slowly rise from the bottom up, filling the space with toxic gas. As the victims struggled to breathe they would trample and fight to reach the ceiling, and often when the doors were open, the bodies would be found piled atop each other, with the strongest at the top. It was far from a peaceful execution, and many

witnesses reported being able to hear the victims screaming and pleading for their lives. They were found with blood seeping from their ears and foam from their mouths.

One of the biggest problems the Nazis faced with their mass killings was corpse disposal. Initially the victims’ bodies were buried in mass graves, but due to the sheer number this became inefficient, so instead they were cremated. The corpses were loaded into fiery pits which were also operated by prisoners from the Special Detachment team. These men would stoke the fire, turn the corpses and drain the excess fat which seeped out, well aware that they, too, would one day meet the same fate. Because the killing at Auschwitz was on a much larger scale, crematoria were created, and the ashes were buried in the ground or dumped in the river. Although the SS members wished to maintain a façade of relative safety, even they were unable to mask the horrific,

putrid smell of burning human flesh which rose from the crematoria.

For those few lucky enough to escape instant extermination, grim, prolonged suffering awaited. The fit inmates would be undressed, then shaved of their body hair and tattooed with the now-infamous registration numbers. They then would be disinfected and scalded or frozen with boiling or freezing showers. Afterwards they would be dressed in striped pyjamas and a pair of uncomfortable wooden clogs, rarely in their actual size, and all aspects of individuality or freedom stripped away.

Although Auschwitz-Birkenau in particular masqueraded as a work camp, with slogans such as ‘Arbeit macht frei’, or ‘Work sets you free’ emblazoned on archways, the Nazi concentration camps never intended to release the vast majority of their victims. The intent instead was death through labour, exhaustion, starvation and disease. Those who were

spared the gas chambers when they arrived had not been given a new chance of life, but a slower, prolonged death.

The Nazis did everything to ensure that these deaths would come. They created wooden or brick barracks, intended to house 40 prisoners, but often more than 700 would be cramped within. There were not proper beds, but straw-filled mattresses spread over wooden bunks, earth floors and next to no sanitary facilities. Although the barracks did have stoves, there was no fuel provided. They were dirty, cramped and freezing, a breeding ground for disease. The winters were especially brutal, and many prisoners died shivering in the plummeting Polish temperatures.

Beyond the barracks themselves the sanitary facilities for prisoners were not only poor, but dangerous. Initially there was no water at all for the inmates to wash themselves or keep clean. When water was finally introduced, it was filthy and riddled with disease. The inmates had no choice but to use it; despite how dirty and stinking it was, washing daily gave the inmates some remnant of a life that was real, and some memory of civilisation – if that was lost, their enemies would have won.

There was certainly no memory of civilisation in the brutal daily routines the prisoners were forced to go through, in fact they were designed to beat every sense of worth and purpose out of them, until all that remained was a husk of what was once a person. Prisoners were awoken at dawn, after having very little sleep. They were forced to stand still in their thin,

ragged clothing through all weathers for hours on end as they were counted. Anyone too weak to stand would be taken away to be executed. Roll call was repeated in the evening, and was often a chance for the officers to punish prisoners who had not worked hard enough, were resisting or showing weakness. They were used to demonstrate to the others what would happen if they stepped out of line, the punishment was always brutal and violent, and more often than not ended in death. It was a daily reminder of how expendable each and every one of them was.

Work within the camp varied depending on the person, the most desirable placement was within the SS offices themselves, filing or administration roles usually filled by women with education. However, due to their lack of protection and rights, this often resulted in sexual exploitation and rape. Most were forced into physical labour, backbreaking factory work, construction projects, or on farms or in coal mines. A lot of the tasks the inmates were given were pointless and humiliating, and they were very rarely provided the proper equipment. For example, Ben Stern, a camp survivor, spoke of a job he was given to carry steel beams in the freezing winter. 20 men were lifting each side of the massive beam, and they were told to place it somewhere. However, when they tried to they were unable as their skin was frozen to the metal. The skin was torn from their hands and began bleeding. The very next day they were forced to carry the same beam back to the original spot. It was

this kind of repetitive, pointless labour that was designed to break the people's spirits and erase all sense of self-worth or strength to fight back.

The exhaustion brought on by the relentless labour was not helped by the inadequate food given to the inmates. The meals were never substantial, and never provided enough calories for the physical exertion their bodies were under. Breakfast usually consisted of imitation coffee and lunch was soup, however



Above: These slave labours interned at the Buchenwald concentration camp were on average found to weigh around 32 kilograms

THE JEWS FIGHT BACK

The suffering of those who managed to survive the death camps didn't end when they were liberated, and some didn't desire a quiet, peaceful life, they lusted after one thing only – revenge. Calling themselves the Nakam, and also known as 'The Avengers', a group of approximately 60 Jews, many of whom were Holocaust survivors grouped together and arrived in Germany to hunt their chosen prey – Nazis. While many of the prominent leaders of the camps had been punished, many Nazis involved in the running of the camps were allowed to wander freely and continue their lives, and the Avengers did not like this.

The group would first identify Nazis, then stage an arrest under the guise of military police, and take the offender away. Then the Jews would enact their revenge, sometimes the Nazis would be strangled, others hanged, in order to mask the murder as a suicide. Nazis were also found in ditches, the supposed victims of hit and runs, or car accidents which occurred due to freak mechanical failures. One huge operation involved a member obtaining a job as a baker at a detention centre for former SS members where he poisoned over 3,000 loaves, resulting

in the deaths of hundreds of men. However, this bread poisoning was only plan B to the original mass murder scheme of poisoning the water supplies of five German cities. The intention was to kill 6 million Germans, a German life for every Jewish life. Luckily, the plan was

foiled when one of the members, loaded with canisters of poison was discovered by British police. Because the Avengers were so discreet, we have no idea how many Nazis met their end through the group, but their message was clear – we have not forgiven or forgotten.



Above: The Avengers were formed by Abba Kovner, a Lithuanian Jew who, during the war, released a manifesto with the famous phrase "Let us not go like lambs to the slaughter!"

"WE HAVE NO IDEA HOW MANY NAZIS THEY KILLED, BUT THEIR MESSAGE WAS CLEAR – WE HAVE NOT FORGIVEN OR FORGOTTEN"

Jews who sought asylum elsewhere were often denied, the refugees on MS St. Louis were turned away from Cuba, Canada and the US



this was watery with nothing in it to eat, sometimes it was simply water warmed up in a metal tin. A thin slice of bread with a tiny slice of sausage or margarine was given in the evening to last until the morning. The lack of food was so prevalent and debilitating that many prisoners starved to death, losing pounds of muscle mass and tissue until they resembled living skeletons. Those prisoners who were quick enough would steal the bread or boots off dead bodies, then use them to trade for something that might aid their own survival, like a place to sleep, or a chance to wash themselves.

All of this exhaustion, pain and hunger combined with the random cullings, and the constant spectre of the crematoria towers pumping out smoke had the exact effect the Nazis desired, and people died in their hundreds of thousands. Many were the victims of starvation and disease, but there were many, enough to earn a nickname, that completely gave up hope. Muselmann (a slang term based on the German word for 'Muslim') were victims who would squat with their legs tucked in, their shoulders curved and their heads down, completely and utterly overcome with despair, and given up all hope of survival. Holocaust survivor Primo Levi wrote that if he

could "enclose all the evil of our time in one image, I would choose this image."

However, not everyone surrendered all hope. There were many who resisted, whether it was simply by continuing to practise their faith or even writing diaries and secretly hiding them to tell of the horrors that happened within. There were also incidents of physical resistance. One woman seized a gun from an SS officer and shot two of them while undressing in the crematorium, another group of Polish prisoners escaped while building a drainage ditch. One of the most remarkable acts of rebellion was when 250 Special Detachment Jews set fire to a crematorium, cut through the fence and reached the outside. Though they were all killed, they took three guards down with them and the crematorium was never used again.

Between May 1940 and January 1945, 1.3 million prisoners were transported to Auschwitz alone; of these, 90 per cent were executed on arrival. The Allies and those in the free world had received information about the Holocaust, but the whole horrific picture of what was truly occurring did not become clear until they were liberated. In late 1944, with the approaching Red Army, Hitler planned to conceal all that had occurred within the camps. The gassings stopped, documents were destroyed and

buildings were burned down or dismantled. Those healthy enough to walk, approximately 58,000, were ordered to evacuate by foot to Loslau, some 63 kilometres away. The exhausted men and women were forced to walk through freezing conditions, many without shoes, and any who fell or were too slow were shot. Some 15,000 prisoners died on this horrific death march.

When the Soviet forces stumbled upon Auschwitz they were greeted by a few thousand sick and ailing prisoners, as well as hundreds of thousands of pieces of clothing, toothbrushes, glasses and seven tonnes of human hair. Army medics hurried to save the survivors, and two military field hospitals were set up; recovery, however, would not come as quick. Those who survived searched for any living relatives and a place to rebuild their lives. Displaced and alone, many refugees ended up living in temporary Displaced Persons camps before emigrating to other countries in the hope of starting a new life. However, a new life – after the things that they had witnessed and experienced – did not come easy. Even when the inmates were free from the barbed wire, from the rising smoke and the SS guards, the trauma of the death camps continued to hold them prisoner, and continued to haunt lives.

Great Battles

THE KURSK SALIENT, SOVIET UNION, 5-13 JULY, 1943

KURSK

Soviet T-34s roll into battle at
Kursk with infantry in support

As the invasion of the Soviet Union stalled, two mechanised heavyweights came face to face in the largest clash of armour the world has ever seen

The last major German offensive on the Eastern Front, 1943's Operation Citadel saw Hitler launch a colossal attack on the Kursk salient, or bulge. It was a move that he believed would provide a victory so bright it would "shine like a beacon around the world." This was a battle of the elite, with both German and Soviet armies near their apex in terms of skill and weaponry, hardened by two years of unrelenting warfare.

The Germans, though depleted in manpower, were, for the first time since the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, fielding qualitative superiority in terms of armour with the formidable Tiger I tanks and new Panthers. These outstripped the Soviet T-34 Model 43s, which had in the intervening years, with

their sloped armour and 76.2mm gun, proved masters of the battlefield.

The Red Army, meanwhile, was a very different beast from that which had faced the German invasion during Operation Barbarossa two years earlier. At the beginning of 1943, more than 16 million men were under arms, supported by a vast number of artillery pieces. Stalin claimed that "artillery is the god of war," and by 1943, the Red Army boasted the largest and most effective artillery divisions in the world. It also had somewhere approaching 10,000 tanks.

At Kursk, these two heavily mechanised forces came together in an enclosed theatre of operations, like two mighty pugilists meeting for a final championship bout. The result was a watershed. "Stalingrad was the end of the

beginning," said Winston Churchill, "but the Battle of Kursk was the beginning of the end."

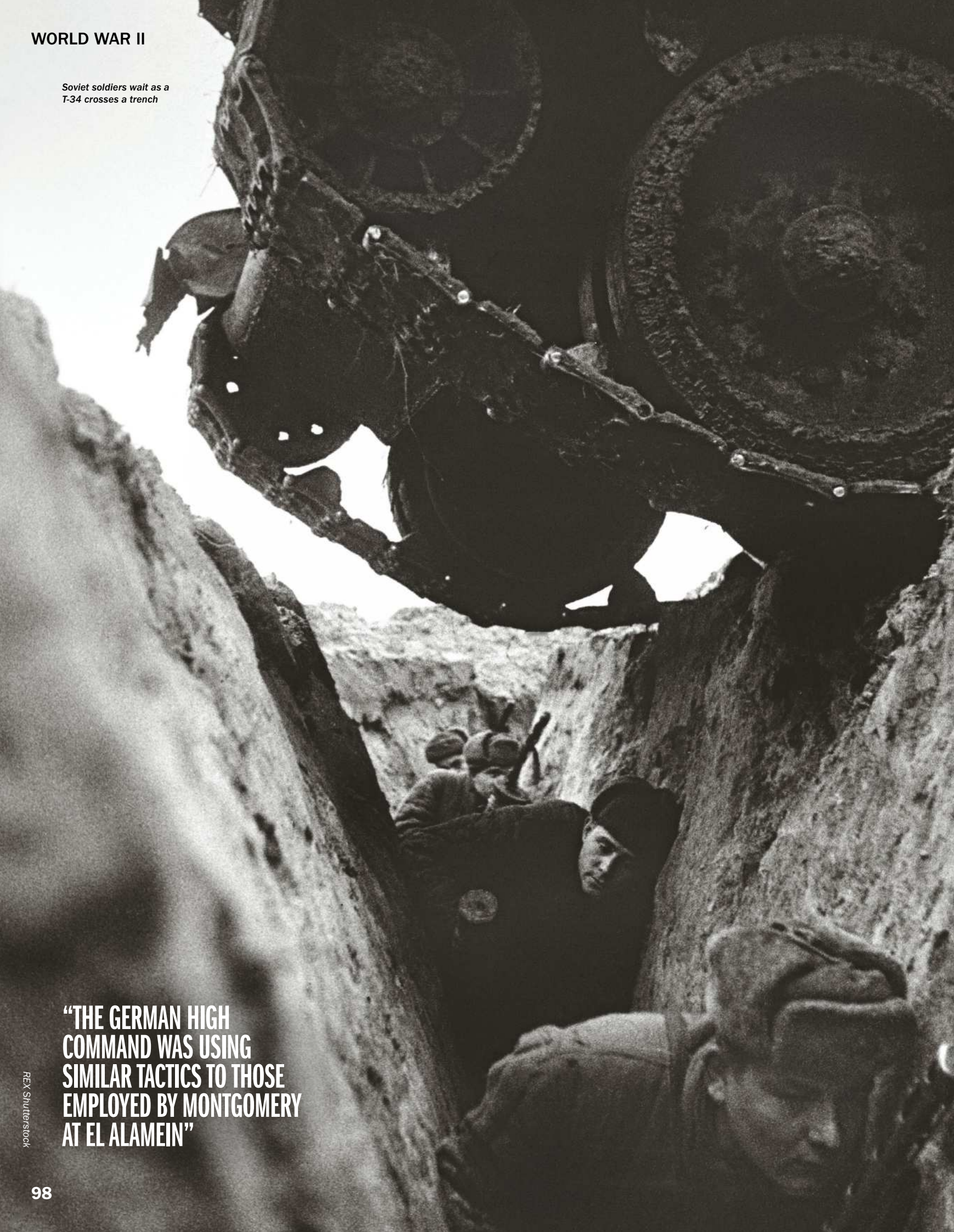
The German plan was to launch a double envelopment against the Kursk salient using Army Group Centre in the north, specifically Colonel-General Model's Ninth Army, while Army Group South battered the southern section with Army Detachment Kempf and Colonel-General Hoth's formidable Fourth Panzer Army. This was an awe-inspiring demonstration of German strength, with 2,700 tanks and assault guns taking to the field.

For Stalin and his senior army commanders, Marshals Zhukov and Vasilevsky, the plan was to launch a massive offensive by first wearing down the mobile German forces in a battle-slog around the Kursk sector. They would use



WORLD WAR II

*Soviet soldiers wait as a
T-34 crosses a trench*



**“THE GERMAN HIGH
COMMAND WAS USING
SIMILAR TACTICS TO THOSE
EMPLOYED BY MONTGOMERY
AT EL ALAMEIN”**

three Fronts (the Soviet equivalent of an Army Group) – Central Front, Voronezh Front and the reserve Steppe Front – to grind down German mechanised forces and thereby leave their territories vulnerable to huge counteroffensives.

In his bid to snare the German armour, Stalin ordered the transformation of the region into what historian and Kursk expert Dennis E Showalter believes to be “the most formidable large-scale defensive system in the history of warfare”: a triple-ringed matrix absorbing almost 1 million men, 20,000 guns and mortars, 300 rocket launchers and 3,300 tanks. Russian engineers uncoiled more than 800 kilometres of barbed wire and lay almost 650,000 mines. The Germans’ only chance, says Showalter, was the might of the steel-headed sledgehammer they eventually swung in July.

That blow came on 5 July, after several days of preliminaries involving the German and Soviet air forces and the roar of countless heavy guns. Tank armadas were suddenly on the move, with the Germans committing squadrons of 100 and in some cases 200 machines or more, with a score of Tiger Is and Ferdinand assault guns in the vanguard. Groups of 50 or so medium tanks came next and then floods of infantry, protected by this armoured screen, moved in behind.

These German armoured wedges were known as ‘Panzerkeil’ and, according to the late historian Alan Clark, amount to a rejection of the traditional principles of the panzer army. In fact, the German high command was using similar tactics to those employed by Montgomery at El Alamein, with the difference here that the defenders’ armour was at numerical parity with the attackers’, or was indeed greater, and their defensive organisation meant that many of their tanks were held in reserve. This proved decisive during the mighty clash at Prokhorovka.

As 5 July unfolded, Colonel-General Model in the north committed more than 500 armoured vehicles from his Ninth Army to the attack in a series of staggered bursts, but so violent was the Soviet resistance that about half of these were out of action by the day’s end. Part of the problem stemmed from the committing of both battalions of the Porsche-built Ferdinands to the attack. These were formidable machines, also known as ‘elephants’, were designed for tank-busting and the destruction of large anti-tank guns. Their 200mm-thick armour provided them with ample protection from static gun positions. Their enormous 88mm cannons, meanwhile, picked off Russian T-34s before they even had a chance to come within range.

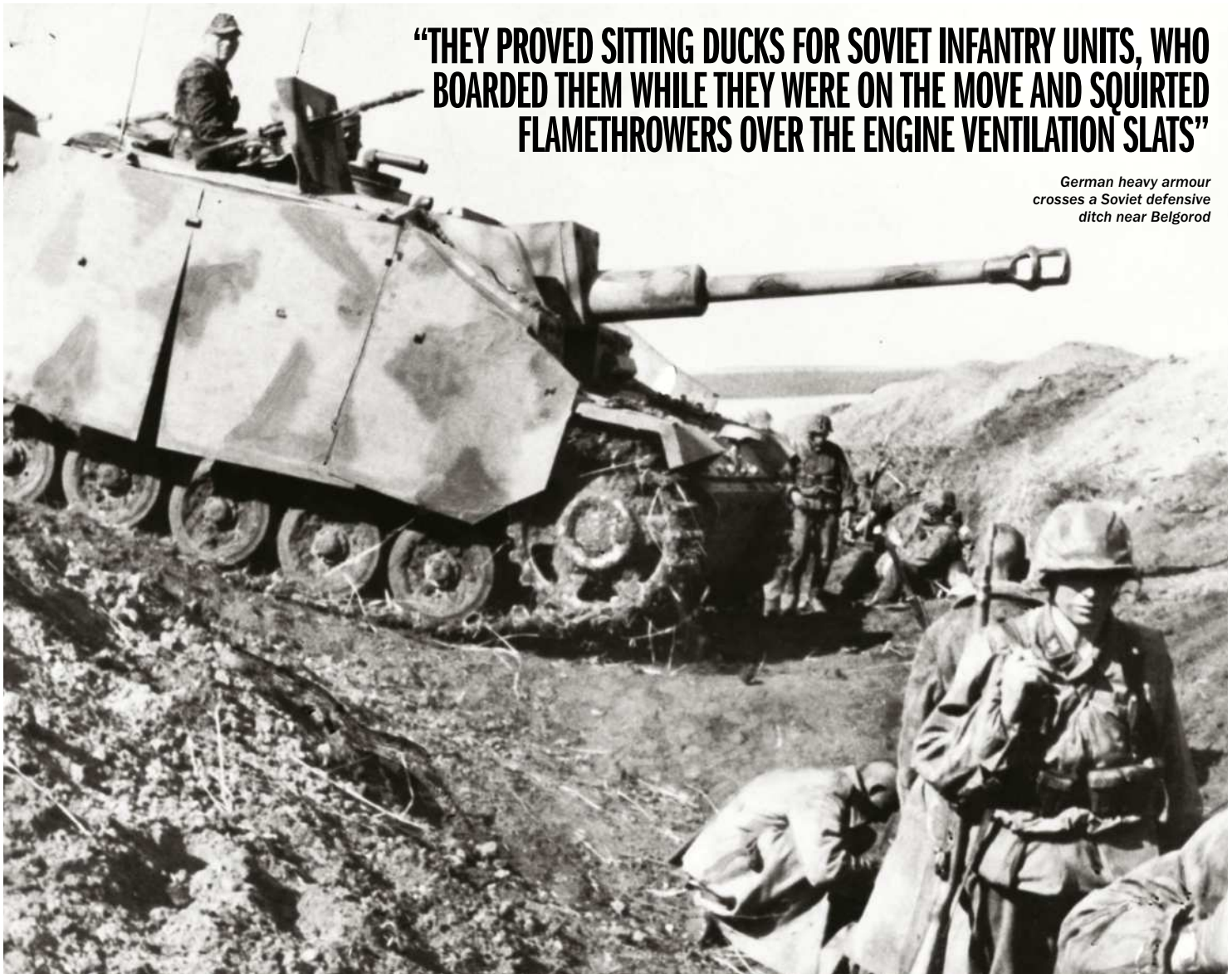
However, the Ferdinands became separated from the lighter tanks and infantry they needed for close-range support. With their static hulls and lack of machine guns, they proved sitting ducks for Soviet infantry units, who boarded them while they were on the move and squirted flamethrowers over the engine ventilation slats. The Ferdinands, however, ploughed through the first line of Soviet defences, allowing the infantry to eventually follow them into the breach, but more than half these beasts of war were lost.

The morning of 5 July also saw the Fourth Panzer Army launch its main offensive thrust in the south, moving along a 48-kilometre front. According to Kursk expert Mark Healey, 700 tanks and assault guns smashed their huge metal fist into the face of the Soviet Sixth Guards Army on the Voronezh Front, but the Russian defences were so tightly entrenched that the German attack stalled. Eventually, the Luftwaffe’s aerial superiority began to take effect and the Fourth Panzer managed to split the Sixth Guards Army in two.

The fighting in both the north and south of the salient was ferocious, and within 12 hours both sides were feeding the fires that raged across the battle for Kursk. Swathes of ground-attack aircraft strafed the battlefields. The armour

“THEY PROVED SITTING DUCKS FOR SOVIET INFANTRY UNITS, WHO BOARDED THEM WHILE THEY WERE ON THE MOVE AND SQUIRTED FLAMETHROWERS OVER THE ENGINE VENTILATION SLATS”

German heavy armour crosses a Soviet defensive ditch near Belgorod



continued to mass and move “on a scale unlike anything seen elsewhere in the war,” according to the eminent historian John Erickson.

The Soviet tank armies responded to the German assault by moving up into their primary defensive positions and somewhere approaching 7,000 tanks were steadily drawn into this immense clash of steel, leaving an ever-growing number of dying hulls smoking on the battlefields. A Russian communiqué claimed that on the first day of battle, 586 German panzers were destroyed or disabled.

The second day of Citadel, 6 July, was heavily overcast and rain hampered both sides throughout. Along the northern sections of the Kursk salient, the Soviets launched a dawn counterattack with General Rokossovsky's Central Front enjoying temporary success, until a force of 250 panzers with infantry moving in its wake halted them in their tracks. Throughout the day, Central Front and the Ninth Army were locked in perpetual struggle.

The German offensive rolled on, with Model aiming for the village of Olkhovka as a prime strategic objective. This high ground provided control over the eastern, southern and western section of his field of operations. The Soviets had already identified this region as strategically vital, and in the weeks running up to Citadel's launch, had transformed it into one of the strongest sections of the defensive belt. The German Panzerkeil, with the Tigers to the fore, thrust ahead, and by noon on 6 July the Germans had no fewer than 1,000 tanks committed to a ten-kilometre front between the villages of Soborovka and Ponyri.

The Russian defences again proved too strong. Time and time again, Model's Panzer Corps ran into trouble. Unperturbed, he tried again on 7 and 8 July, redeploying huge swathes of aircraft in a bid to penetrate the Soviet resistance. The Soviets were just too well dug in, however, and the German attack ground to a halt once more. “The wrack of shattered panzers marking Ninth Army's advance,” writes Healey, bear “mute testament to the fact that the momentum of Model's offensive was already beginning to decay.”

Meanwhile, along the southern stretch of the Kursk salient, the second day of Citadel's operations looked promising for the Germans. The elite section of Hoth's Fourth Panzer Army, II SS Panzer Corps, had already bitten into the first line of Soviet defence and looked set to devour the second line on the morning of 6 July.

General Vatutin, commanding the Voronezh Front, suggested an immediate counterattack, but was swiftly deflected by a senior officer who highlighted the destruction caused by the Tigers' and Panthers' large turret guns with their far superior range. Digging in their T-34s and preparing a wall of defensive fire would serve them better, he argued.

**“THE SOVIET DEFENCES
AGAIN PROVED TOO STRONG.
TIME AND TIME AGAIN,
MODEL'S PANZER CORPS
RAN INTO TROUBLE”**



3. THE IRON FISTS CLASH

Both Leibstandarte and Totenkopf are drawn into close-quarters combat, and confusion reigns. Individual tank battles are the order of the day and hundreds of tanks are disabled by direct hits to the weaker side armour. It is said that some burning T-34s ram their German adversaries.

4. SOVIET FLANK ATTACKS

Several corps from the Fifth Guards Army engage Totenkopf's left flank. Though seen as a tank battle, infantry units fight ferociously at Prokhorovka, with Russian anti-tank rifles in particular used to maximum effect. Preventing Totenkopf from commanding the position north of Prokhorovka is vital to halting the German advance.

2. THE SOVIET ARMOUR ENGAGES

The Soviet Fifth Guards Tank Army moves out to counter the German advance as quickly as possible, bidding to get into close combat and therefore minimise the efficacy of the Germans' longer-range guns. The Luftwaffe continues its support, outfighting the Soviets in the air.

5. THE SOUTHERN EDGE

South of Prokhorovka, a tough corps from the Fifth Guards Tank Army engages the SS Das Reich division, forcing the Germans to adopt a mostly defensive position on the right flank. The Soviets are keen to ensure that potential support arriving in the form of the approaching III Panzer Corps does not reach the field.



Still, with help from the Luftwaffe, the German armour rammed through the Russian defence and by the end of 6 July, the SS Panzer Corps was wreaking havoc amid the second Soviet defensive line. The following day was cold and the two sides fought in the descending mist, with the Germans pushing steadily on towards the small town of Oboyan, which defended Kursk from the south.

Early in the morning on 7 July, 400 panzers supported by armoured infantry and airpower crashed onto the First Tank Army of the Voronezh Front, which wavered under the onslaught. By 10 July, members of Hoth's XLVIII Panzer Corps seized Hill 244.8, which stood as the most northerly point taken by the Germans in their bid to reach Kursk. SS Panzer Corps, meanwhile, fought a path through the Soviet defensive line

“THE GREAT BATTLE OF PROKHOROVKA BEGAN BENEATH LEADEN SKIES, WARM AND HUMID, WHICH UNLEASHED RAIN AND PEELS OF THUNDER AS THE DAY WORE ON”

and regrouped to direct a major assault against Prokhorovka, which, if successful, looked set to smash Soviet resistance in the south.

Back on the northern face of the salient, Model continued his bid to take the village of Ponyri and fierce hand-to-hand fighting erupted, earning Ponyri the name of ‘Stalingrad of the Kursk’. The two sides fought to a bitter standstill. On the night of 10 July, Model committed his last reserves to the fray, and although by 12 July his divisions held most of the village, the Russian defence was too robust and the Ninth Army couldn't effect a full breakthrough. When the Germans received intelligence suggesting a major Soviet offensive was set to launch against the Orel bulge, Army Group Centre pulled sections of the Ninth Army away from the action and Model's attack halted.

Come the night of 11 July, and although the Germans were eroding the Soviet position in the south, Stalin and his generals couldn't fail to feel confident. Model's position, hemmed in at Ponyri, left them free to move their armoured reserve, the Fifth Guards Tank Army of the Steppe Front, against Hoth's divisions in the salient's southern section.

With Stalin realising that a final battle was set to unfold, the Fifth Guards Tank Army was placed under the command of General Vatutin on the Voronezh Front, a move that led to what is widely regarded as Kursk's defining moment, the mighty tank battle at Prokhorovka.

Above: Soviet artillery took a heavy toll on German armour at Kursk

“All the elements of myth were at hand,” Showalter says of this imminent clash of armour. “Prokhorovka offered a head-on, stand-up grapple between the elite troops of the world's best armies on a three-mile [five-kilometre] front under conditions that left no room for fancy manoeuvres or for air and artillery to make much difference.”

The German II SS Panzer Corps, incorporating the panzer grenadier divisions ‘Leibstandarte’, ‘Das Reich’ and ‘Totenkopf’, was pitted against the Fifth Guards Tank Army. These elite troops met as both went on the attack, “an encounter battle in the literal sense, suggesting predators in rut.” Other Soviet units also took to the field, including divisions of the Fifth Guards Army, as well as sections of the First Tank Army and Sixth Guards Army.

Colonel-General Hoth of the German Fourth Panzer Army, his armour having penetrated the Russian defensive line, was keen to push on before “a defensive scab could form over the thin membrane exposed in the remaining Russian defences,” as Clark writes.

At the same time, divisions from the III Panzer Corps, part of Army Detachment Kempf, were moving northward to join II SS Panzer Corps, provoking the Soviets to engage Hoth's forces post-haste. Aware that the German Tigers and

Panthers had a longer range than their T-34s, the Soviets bid to move into close combat.

They grossly overestimated the quality of German tanks on this battlefield, according to Kursk historian Lloyd Clark, who claims that the Germans fielded no Panthers or Ferdinands at Prokhorovka, and that II SS Panzer Corps had just 15 Tigers – ten with Totenkopf, four with Leibstandarte and just a solitary giant with Das Reich. Other historians disagree.

Whatever the truth, Leibstandarte, Das Reich and Totenkopf moved in to attack and the great Battle of Prokhorovka began beneath leaden skies, warm and humid, which unleashed rain and peels of thunder as the day wore on. The Germans fielded approximately 600 tanks and assault guns, the Russians 900 (though only about a third of these were T-34s). Hostilities erupted early on 12 July and the inferno blazed all day. The Luftwaffe flew sorties overhead, and the Germans maintained air superiority throughout the battle, though this counted for little in the end.

SS divisions Leibstandarte and Totenkopf moved first in wedge formation, their Tigers in the vanguard, stopping to unload their mighty 88mm shells before moving onward. At about 0830, the Soviet lines unleashed a 15-minute artillery barrage before the Fifth Guards Tank

“THE BATTLE OF KURSK CEDED THE INITIATIVE TO THE RED ARMY, WHICH THEN ROLLED ON TOWARDS BERLIN”

Army rolled towards the tide of panzers, bidding to get into close-quarters combat.

Before long, scores of tanks were churning up the battlefield in individual engagements. Up close, the tanks' thinner side armour was more easily penetrated. Thick smoke from the blazing hulls drifted across the battlefield, making gunnery all the more troublesome. The SS Panzer Corps maintained the pressure throughout the day and the Germans tried desperately to bring III Panzer Corps from Army Detachment Kempf into play. If these machines could enter the battle, it may well have turned the advantage firmly in the Germans' favour. III Panzer, however, couldn't break through in time and the SS had to fight for Prokhorovka with no further ground support.

Historians talk of a last surge by Leibstandarte and Das Reich aimed at breaking the Soviet lines on the battlefield's western

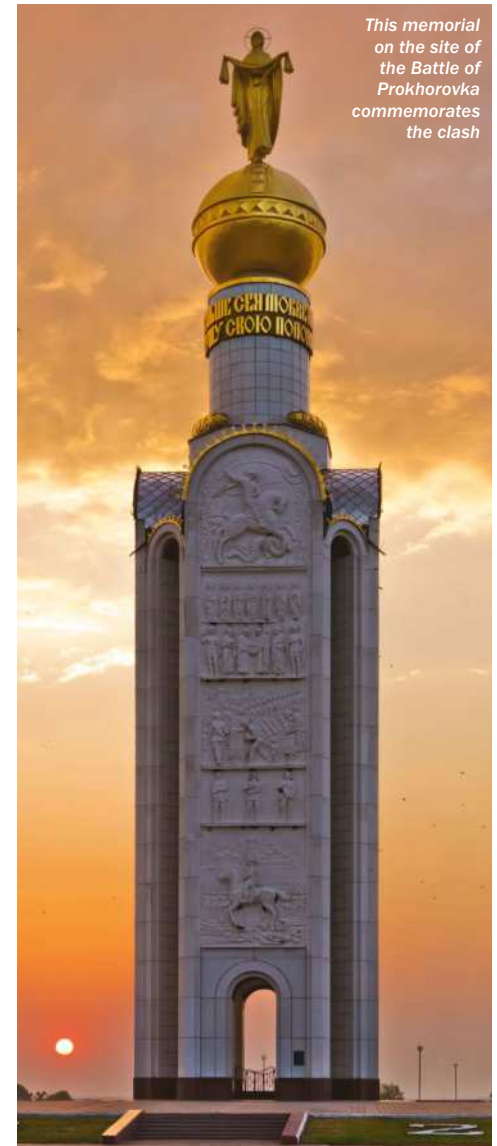
edge, but Fifth Guards Tank Army's Lieutenant-General Rotmistrov engaged his final reserves and the tanks clashed head-on once more, darkening the sky with smoke and dust. The fierce fighting continued well into the night but the Soviets had done their job – they had stopped the German advance.

It is estimated that more than half of the Fifth Guards Tank Army's machines were destroyed. “The Waffen SS won a tactical victory on 12 July,” writes Showalter. “Prokhorovka was not a Tiger graveyard but a T-34 junkyard. Operationally, however, the palm rests with the Red Army.” Prokhorovka bled the German military machine dry. About 300 panzers lay abandoned on the battlefield, and though some may have been salvaged, the field remained in Soviet hands.

Between 13-15 July, SS Panzer Corps continued to make sorties against the Russian defences but in reality it was all over. Hitler called off Operation Citadel on 13 July as the Russians launched a massive offensive, Operation Kutuzov, aimed at Army Group Centre along the Orel salient. The Battle of Kursk ceded the initiative to the Red Army, which then rolled on towards Berlin. For Hitler and the Wehrmacht, defeat was edging ever closer.



Soviet soldiers fire on Germans during the Battle of Kursk



This memorial on the site of the Battle of Prokhorovka commemorates the clash

Images: Alamy, Ed Crooks, Rex Features





MOMENT IN TIME

A German tank advances during the Battle of the Bulge, while American POWs are marched to the rear. Hitler hoped to split the British and US forces, leading to their surrender

HITLER'S REVENGE

ARDENNES

Devised by Hitler, the Third Reich's final major offensive in WWII would prove costly, severely limiting the Nazis' ability to defend Berlin from the Soviets in the spring of 1945

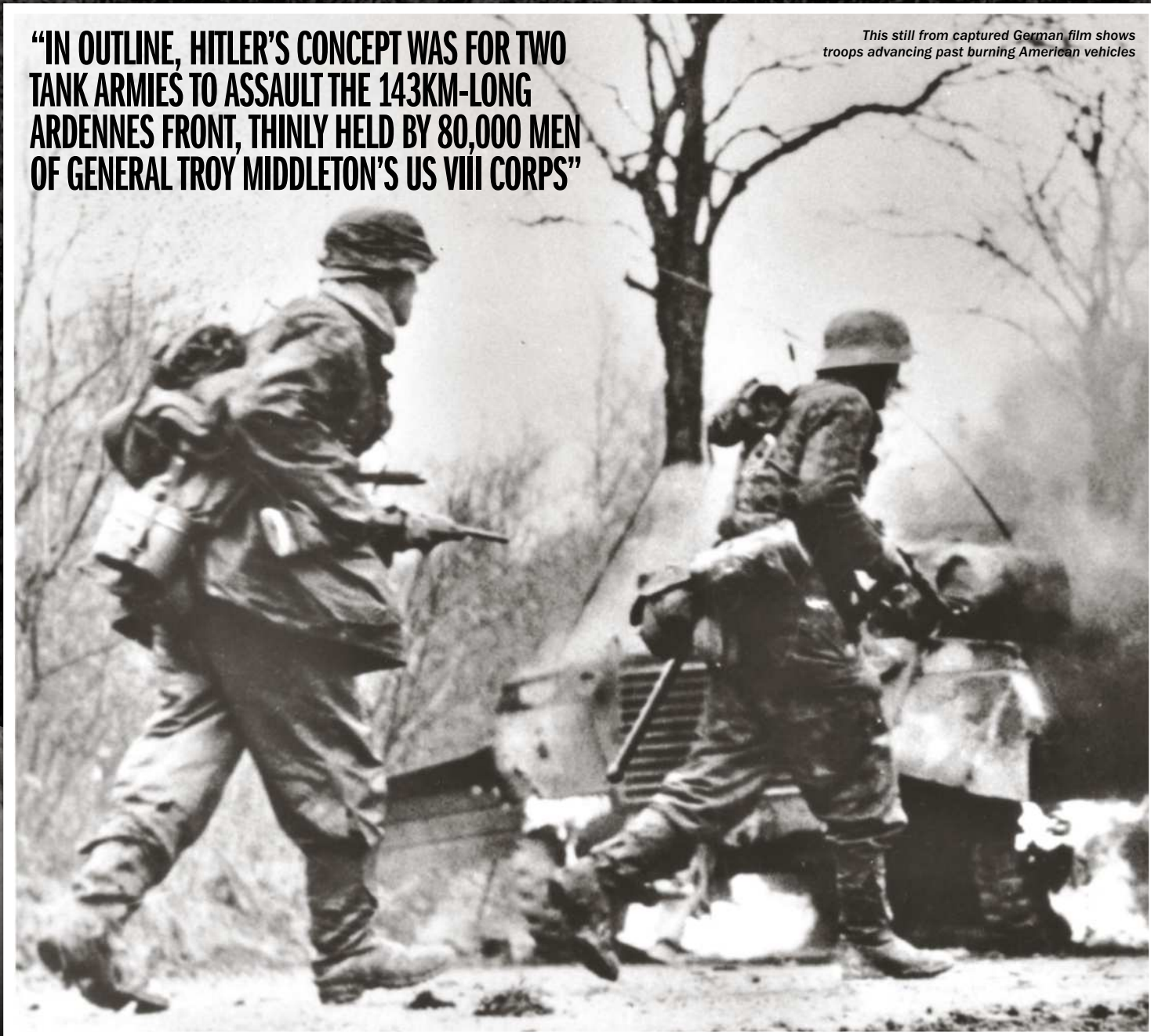
December each year focuses the mind on the winter Ardennes Campaign of 1944, one of Germany's last major offensives against the Western Allies after D-Day. It began on 16 December in appalling weather and took the Allies by complete surprise. However, after some initial successes, the attack had stalled by Christmas and petered out by mid-January, costing each side between 80-100,000 casualties.

Wacht am Rhein

In outline, Hitler's concept was for two tank armies to assault the 143-kilometre-long Ardennes front, thinly held by 80,000 men of General Troy Middleton's US VIII Corps. In the first wave, Middleton's GIs would be attacked by more than 200,000 Germans with 600 tanks and other tracked vehicles. In the north,

“IN OUTLINE, HITLER’S CONCEPT WAS FOR TWO TANK ARMIES TO ASSAULT THE 143KM-LONG ARDENNES FRONT, THINLY HELD BY 80,000 MEN OF GENERAL TROY MIDDLETON’S US VIII CORPS”

This still from captured German film shows troops advancing past burning American vehicles



General Josef Dietrich's Sixth Panzer Army, composed mainly of SS units, was ordered to slice through US lines, swarm over the Elsenborn Ridge, cross the Meuse river at Liège and head for Antwerp. On their left flank, Baron Hasso von Manteuffel's Fifth Panzer Army would cross the hills and river network to their front between Saint Vith and Bastogne, aim for Namur on the Meuse, and beyond, for Brussels.

The initial plan was for the northern flank to be protected by the German 15th Army, but in the event they contributed nothing to the operation, being exhausted by the recent Market Garden and Hürtgen Forest campaigns. However, guarding the southern flank was Erich Brandenberger's Seventh Army, heavy in infantry but with no armour at all. Their task was also to effect a river crossing, advance to the vicinity of Luxembourg City and block any counterattacks, which were widely expected from the general the Germans most feared – George Patton – and his US Third Army.

The GIs spaced along the Ardennes comprised a mixture of tested veteran infantrymen in the Second, Fourth and 28th Divisions, and 'greenhorns' such as the recently arrived 99th and 106th Divisions. Yet even the battle-hardened Fourth and 28th were full of replacement men, having lost huge numbers in the hell of the Hürtgen Forest campaign, which had just ended. Nevertheless, even the newest American recruit had received months of useful training before deployment, and was supported by the industrial might of the United States.

Initially codenamed Wacht am Rhein ('Watch on the Rhine'), the attack was planned personally by the Führer. Its genesis is usually ascribed to a conference in the Wolf's Lair (his East Prussian headquarters) on 16 September, when Hitler suddenly demanded a massive panzer counterattack with air support to retake Antwerp, which had just fallen. The thrust was to commence on 1 November, when the usual

autumnal weather of low cloud and fog would ground the Allied air forces.

Hitler's choice of Antwerp was strategic – he knew the port would drastically rebalance the Allies' logistics. Until that moment, his British, American and Canadian opponents were having to drag their supplies – at a huge cost in fuel – the 480 kilometres from the Normandy beaches to the front, as no other working harbours had been captured. The use of Antwerp (admittedly the German-occupied banks of the Scheldt estuary leading to Antwerp had yet to be subdued) could shorten this journey by two-thirds and enable the Allies to deploy their massive logistics resources to maximum effect.

In fact, as early as 31 July, we now know that Hitler ordered Germany's western frontier defences, known as the Siegfried Line, to be re-strengthened and rearmed. Strikingly, he also instructed General Jodl at OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, or Supreme



A destroyed US half-track can be seen behind this German soldier signalling to his unit

Command of the Armed Forces) to study the documents relating to 'dem Vorbild des Jahres 1940' – the 'role model of 1940' – meaning the successful German attack through the Ardennes into France.

Thus, it seems that Hitler anticipated the defeat in Normandy, followed by the Allied advance to the Siegfried Line. The OKW historian, Major Percy Schramm, a pre-war professor of history, dug out the 1940 files and noted how Hitler's favourite general, Erwin Rommel, had sliced through the Belgian-French defences in the heavily wooded Ardennes with his Seventh Panzer Division in just three days. So the conference on 16 September, which is often reported as Hitler having a sudden brainwave for the counterattack, was in fact the result of several weeks of planning and research by OKW staff.

Analysis of those present in the Wolf's Lair on 16 September shows the usual assembly of military officers, but after a situation report, Hitler went into a private session with a chosen few, where he announced the planned counterstrike. At this second meeting were representatives of the SS, Luftwaffe and diplomatic corps – a guest list that seems to have been carefully chosen. We can now

conclude that it was essentially an attempt by Hitler to reassert his control over the Third Reich.

Colonel Count Claus von Stauffenberg's bomb plot of 20 July had shaken the Führer so much that he had withdrawn into himself, accompanied by a breakdown in his health. He also assumed the failed assassination would encourage other groups at the heart of the Reich to stage another coup, but if he could pull off a further spectacular victory, this might be averted. His best victory was, of course, the conquest of France in May-June 1940 – heralded by the Ardennes attack.

Lessons from Market Garden

At every level, from Eisenhower's Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) downwards, the Allies assumed from late August 1944 that after their victory in Normandy, the German forces were spent and the war might be concluded by Christmas – Ike's staff called this the 'Happy Hypothesis'. So, it comes as no surprise to find that while Hitler on 16 September was pointing at maps and explaining his plan for a massive panzer thrust to Antwerp, 193 kilometres away, the Allies were preparing something very similar.

At almost the same hour, Lieutenant-General Brian Horrocks of Britain's XXX Corps was briefing his officers on a daring Allied venture to push armour down a 96-kilometre corridor, deep into German lines in Holland – 'objective Arnhem'. The 'Happy Hypothesis' that the German Army in the west was finished would soon unravel in Operation Market Garden, which began the following day.

After its completion, both sides should have learned more from the failed airborne assault than they did. The ability of scantily trained Luftwaffe and army battlegroups, hastily summoned to the Market Garden area to prevail alongside the Waffen-SS, should have warned the Allies what they could expect in the future, for it was precisely this mix of veteran and green multiservice troops that would emerge out of the Ardennes on 16 December.

For the Germans, if Horrocks' XXX Corps was unable to manage the 96 kilometres to Arnhem in good weather with air superiority, what hope had the Ardennes venture of reaching Antwerp, which was double the distance, in poor weather and without air cover?

Hitler pushed ahead with his plans, rejecting out of hand all protests from his military staff to scale down or cancel the assault.

THE SOLDIERS OF AUTUMN MIST

UNITS ASSIGNED TO THE OPERATION WERE A MIXTURE OF HARDENED VETERANS, ZEALOUS VOLUNTEERS AND CAJOLED CIVILIANS

On paper, the attacking armies were very different in their makeup. The Sixth was dominated by the Waffen-SS, the Fifth by the army's elite panzer formations and the Seventh comprised poorly equipped infantrymen. In practice, the three formations were to have in their vanguard newly raised infantry divisions designated as Volksgrenadiers. These were all established in the autumn of 1944 and were smaller in size than their predecessors. Their officers and NCOs had somehow survived the Russian front. Most of the rank and file were the very young – Hitler Youths aged as young as 16 – and much older men who had so far escaped conscription. These included men up to 45 who were heads of families, farmers, employees of the state railways or war workers in weapons factories, whose jobs were taken by German women or skilled foreign labour.

In addition, Luftwaffe personnel and Kriegsmarine sailors who no longer had planes or ships to maintain found themselves re-rolled as infantry. Ethnic Germans were also inducted into the army and convalescent troops were discharged from hospital early, to be posted to the new combat units. Most of these groups proved reluctant infantrymen, and were often slow learners over the couple of months in which they had to learn soldiering – from scratch. The Sixth Army's commander, Josef 'Sepp' Dietrich, was an early party member, former chauffeur and bodyguard of Hitler's, and entrusted with the starring role of taking Antwerp. As a favourite of the Führer, his men were assigned the lion's share of the available engineers, and bridging and anti-aircraft units, as well as possessing the well-equipped First and 12th SS Panzer Divisions. Often overlooked was the fact that his infantry were Volksgrenadier formations, not cutting-edge Schutzstaffel. Traditional accounts of his SS units have emphasised their combat experience, but new research proves that by 1944 they were accepting conscripts, former Luftwaffe personnel and ethnic Germans into their ranks, as well as hardened Nazi volunteers. The fighting effectiveness of all SS sub-units was further diluted by their lack of training and the staggering losses in men and equipment they had suffered in Normandy. One SS colonel

complained to a colleague of the Ukrainian replacements assigned to him "who do not even speak German," adding, "There is a shortage of everything... and no transport to bring forward mortars and anti-tank guns... Heil Hitler!"

In the Fifth Army, led by the short, wiry former Olympic athlete Baron von Manteuffel, the same drawbacks applied to the tank formations (Second, 116th and Panzer Lehr Divisions), which started the campaign with only a fraction of the armoured vehicles and experienced crews they had deployed to Normandy in June. They were likewise supported by Volksgrenadiers – who were unable to keep up. Manteuffel, a tactically insightful commander, observed that his terrain offered better going for armour than that assigned to Dietrich. He was disappointed that both Skorzeny's commandos and an air assault by paratroopers were to be deployed only in support of the Sixth Army.

The baron warned Berlin that relatively small road blocks could hold up Dietrich's advance, whereas the open country to his Fifth Army's front would favour paratroopers, gliders and flanking manoeuvres. All such suggestions for improvements to the plan, however, were ignored by Berlin, because of Hitler's refusal to change even minor details. Besides, they challenged the potential of the Führer's beloved SS. The scheme was his, and launched in defiance of his field marshals.

Gerd von Rundstedt, supreme commander in the west, was a sceptic from the start, afterwards observing, "It was nonsensical; if we had reached even the Meuse, we should have got down on our knees and thanked God." Closer to the planning was Field Marshal Walther Model of Army Group 'B', who privately announced beforehand, "This plan hasn't got a damned leg to stand on," and admitting to Colonel Friedrich von der Heydte (leader of the paratroopers supporting Dietrich's Sixth Army), "The entire operation has no more than a ten per cent chance of success."

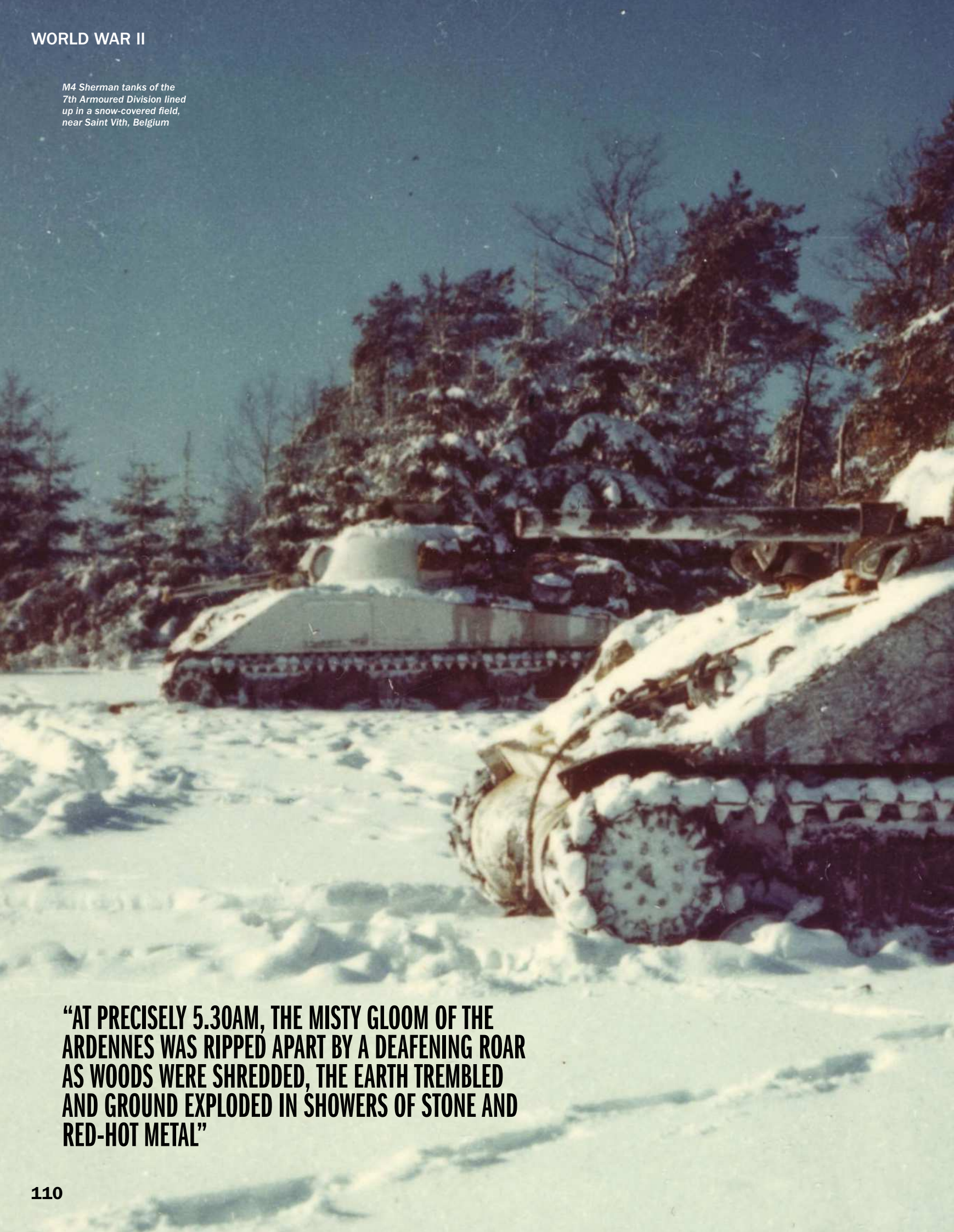
General Hasso von Manteuffel in August 1944



"MOST OF THE RANK AND FILE WERE THE VERY YOUNG – HITLER YOUTHS AGED AS YOUNG AS 16 – AND MUCH OLDER MEN WHO HAD SO FAR ESCAPED CONSCRIPTION"

Captured soldiers from the 12th SS Panzer Division of the Hitlerjugend
Inset above: General Sepp Dietrich (left) meets troops in January 1945

*M4 Sherman tanks of the
7th Armoured Division lined
up in a snow-covered field,
near Saint Vith, Belgium*



**“AT PRECISELY 5.30AM, THE MISTY GLOOM OF THE
ARDENNES WAS RIPPED APART BY A DEAFENING ROAR
AS WOODS WERE SHREDDED, THE EARTH TREMBLED
AND GROUND EXPLODED IN SHOWERS OF STONE AND
RED-HOT METAL”**



Market Garden gave him the inspiration to incorporate a parachute drop into the attack (the Germans had rarely descended into battle by air since Crete). A local attack by US forces using captured German equipment in the street fighting for Aachen also stirred his imagination sufficiently to summon his favourite SS commander to his HQ. Lieutenant Colonel Otto Skorzeny was instructed to recruit a unit of English-speaking commandos, who would – suitably attired in GI uniforms, driving US vehicles – penetrate American lines to cause mayhem and confusion.

The Führer had come to rely on the tall, scar-faced Skorzeny, a fellow Austrian, as a ‘fixer’ in times of crisis: in July 1943, he had rescued Mussolini from captivity in central Italy, while a year later he had helped crush the 20 July plot in central Berlin. The SS officer was very much a protégé of Hitler – an extremely capable charmer, a natural businessman and charismatic leader in his own right, who usually ‘got things done’, whatever the circumstances. He would also remain loyal to his boss and his ideals long after the war.

That Hitler took to him, seeing the light of a ‘true believer’ in his eyes, is obvious, because Skorzeny was one of the first to be told of the plans – even before the field marshals and army commanders who would eventually launch the attack. In retrospect, given the extensive modern use of special forces troops, it is surprising that Germany made little use of Skorzeny-type units: in this respect, the Germans actually fought a remarkably ‘conventional’ war.

The attack begins

There remains a debate as to how *Herbstnebel* (‘Autumn Mist’ – the final code name for the operation) came as a complete surprise to the Allies. It was partly the fault of the ‘Happy Hypothesis’, emanating from Eisenhower’s

SHAEF headquarters that the German army was finished. Reflecting this spirit of optimism, units were encouraged to disregard tactical intelligence reports gained from aerial reconnaissance, signal intercepts, and prisoner and civilian interrogations that suggested the opposite. Strategic intelligence from Bletchley Park also dried up. As the Reich shrank, the need to send coded messages by the Enigma enciphering machine (which Bletchley could decipher) diminished. Instead, officer couriers hand-delivered written orders. The warning signs were there, but they were buried among Enigma signals sent by Deutsche Reichsbahn (German railways) detailing troop and equipment moves towards the Ardennes, and Luftwaffe messages detailing the concentration of aircraft for a future mission – misinterpreted as a deployment of fighters against the Allied bombing fleets.

After several postponements, the blow eventually fell on 16 December, the date being decided by the onset of fog and snow in the battle area. This, in turn, was triggered by weather reports over the previous week from U-boats in the North Atlantic: Bletchley Park intercepted their signals, but attached no immediate significance to them.

At precisely 5.30am, the misty gloom of the Ardennes was ripped apart by a deafening roar as woods were shredded, the earth trembled and ground exploded in showers of stone and red-hot metal. GIs hunkered down

Above: Refugees evacuate past US troops in the town of Bastogne in December 1944

in their trenches, bunkers and commandeered houses, wondering what was happening, while every calibre of shell the Third Reich possessed was hurled at them. Headquarters, artillery positions and communications links were targeted, and soon, out of the darkness swarmed hundreds of Volksgrenadiers, who swiftly overwhelmed the forward positions.

Hitler had ordered that both the tank armies – Dietrich’s Sixth and Manteuffel’s Fifth – be preceded in their assaults by the Volksgrenadier divisions. This was in contrast to the advance of May 1940 over the same terrain, which had been spearheaded by armour, with the infantry plodding behind and mopping up. Back then, Rommel’s Seventh Panzer Division had made it to the river Meuse in three days. The Führer’s ambitious timetable called on his armies to achieve the same in two days – but in mid-winter amid appalling weather.

“HITLER PUSHED AHEAD WITH HIS PLANS, REJECTING OUT OF HAND ALL PROTESTS FROM HIS MILITARY STAFF TO SCALE DOWN OR CANCEL THE ASSAULT”



Traffic of the 87th Infantry Division in the woods of Wallerode, Belgium in January 1945



American soldiers in Wiltz, near Bastogne, in January 1945

THE MALMEDY MASSACRE



IN ONE OF THE BLOODY CAMPAIGN'S DARKEST MOMENTS, OUT OF FRUSTRATION, REVENGE, OR SIMPLY TO SPREAD FEAR, SS TROOPS OPEN FIRE ON 113 US POWs

Reaching the outskirts of Malmedy on the afternoon of 17 December, and surprising a US convoy, SS-Colonel Jochen Peiper's column captured the vehicles and shot their crews. In the infamous massacre, 113 surrendered GIs were gunned down, of whom 43 survived. Two journalists, Jack Belden from *Time Magazine* and Hal Boyle of Associated Press happened to be in the vicinity and immediately reported the outrage, which was circulated by the US First Army without censorship.

Why had this happened? Essentially, the SS troops had spent much of their war on the Eastern Front, where such massacres of Russian troops and civilians were common, even encouraged. Peiper had also briefed his men beforehand: "In the coming operation, the regiment will have the duty to attack recklessly... the coming mission will be the

last chance to win the war. The enemy must become totally crazed with fear that the SS are coming." Other, smaller massacres by Volksgrenadier units against GIs and civilians were recorded, too. The resultant publicity not only stiffened the Allied resolve to resist, but unleashed a trail of violence against captured Germans as the campaign degenerated into unmitigated horror in the snow-covered landscape.

Peiper's murderous actions were also a reaction to the Allied bombing of German cities, and possibly an expression of his own frustration that his Ardennes advance was so slow. He knew, as did his fellow commanders all along the front, that the Americans would eventually recover from the surprise of the assault, and concentrate their huge combat power against these warriors of the Reich.

Above: Jochen Peiper was eventually convicted of war crimes and imprisoned for 12 years

Bodies of Belgians, also massacred by the German military during its counteroffensive, await identification before burial



A corpse of a US soldier after the Malmedy Massacre



"THE ENEMY MUST BECOME TOTALLY CRAZED WITH FEAR THAT THE SS ARE COMING" SS-Colonel Jochen Peiper

The odds were against them from the start, as the Volksgrenadiers relied on horses (they took 50,000 to the Bulge) and their artillery was mostly of World War I vintage, or captured French or Russian stock. Their effectiveness was highly variable, and rested on the quality of their officers and the amount of training that each had received. Their chief weapon was surprise, along with the StG 44. The lightweight Sturmgewehr, with its signature curved magazine of 25 rounds, was the direct ancestor of the Kalashnikov AK-47. Capable of 500 rounds per minute, it was issued to the attacking Volksgrenadiers and increased their firepower to disguise their lack of numbers.

Charles MacDonald, a junior officer with the Second Division up in the north, remembered, "Stray bullets from the small-arms fight up ahead began to zing through the woods." Shortly afterwards, "A hail of fire which sounded like the crack of a thousand rifles echoed through the forest. There was no doubt now. My men could see the billed caps

of the approaching troops." What MacDonald described in his famous book, *Company Commander*, was the arrival of Volksgrenadiers with their StG 44s.

In the south, Erich Brandenberger's Seventh Army, with few bridging units, were held up trying to cross the water obstacles to their front and achieved few of their Day One objectives. Their opponents of the US Fourth Infantry Division (with reporter Ernest Hemingway in tow) held firm. In the centre, Manteuffel's tank units were similarly slowed by the inability of their engineers and Volksgrenadiers to negotiate a swift passage over the rivers to their front. Only on the Fifth Army's very northern flank, where they had high ground, rather than water, to cross, did his men keep up to schedule, eventually surrounding two regiments of the US 106th Division, east of Saint Vith.

To the north, Dietrich was immediately held up by spirited American opposition and poor road conditions – exactly as Manteuffel had predicted – and failed to make any significant

progress until 17 December. On that day, an armoured column belonging to his First SS Division burst out of the bottleneck, and leaving their infantry behind, thrust deep into American lines. SS-Colonel Jochen Peiper's unit would later that day take part in the slaughter of 70 surrendered GIs, in what became known as the Malmedy Massacre.

The trouble was that the landscape of the Ardennes worked against the attackers. Rapid movement was constrained to a few routes that ran east to west through key towns – Bastogne and Saint Vith among them. Control of these roads, and the settlements that sat astride each intersection, would prove vital to the defence of the region. The superior training the GIs received before arriving in Europe meant that the defence of each crossroads was a tactical template that most adopted, independently, throughout the Ardennes – and one that would ultimately stall the German advance. In May 1940, Belgian and French troops had relinquished control of these route

centres early in the battle, surrendering the initiative to their German foes – which explains the contrasting fortunes of defending the Ardennes between 1940 and 1944.

The landscape of forests, hills and deep valleys naturally isolated defender and attacker alike from their parent units. For many Americans, the battle was perceived as a local German attack, made in strength. One remarked that it was only on 18 December that, “We finally began to realise we were in a situation that was more than a local spoiling attack by the Wehrmacht,” while another commented, “It was 20 December before we found out this was the Battle of the Bulge and we were in it.”

In the south, Brandenberger's Seventh Army soon ground to a halt and dug in – which was their task. In the north, Peiper equally quickly ran out of routes, when US Army engineers, often from Lieutenant Colonel David E Pergrin's 291st Combat Engineer Battalion, blew a series of bridges that stalled his advance. Peiper's armoured column included a battalion of Tiger II ('King Tiger') tanks. At the time, Nazi cameramen, and model-makers since, have lingered over these panzers, which carried an 88mm gun and armour up to 18 centimetres thick. No more than 50 were present in the Bulge (the main warhorse being the old Panzer IV) and at 70 tons, Tiger IIs were too heavy for most bridges, consumed nearly three gallons of fuel per mile, and were plagued with mechanical problems; Peiper would lose more to breakdown than enemy action. Contrary to the many myths that have grown around the Bulge, the SS commander so disliked these heavy tanks that he forced them to travel at the rear of his advance.

Resistance at Elsenborn Ridge, Saint Vith and Bastogne

On Peiper's right, the 12th SS Panzer division soon came up against the high ground around Elsenborn, onto which Colonel von der Heydte's paratroopers had been dropped. With many scattered in the bad weather, or suffering injuries on landing, few had reached their rendezvous. They were soon rounded up or overwhelmed. By the time the 12th SS arrived at the Elsenborn Ridge, US commanders had amassed 23 artillery battalions on the high ground. It was the greatest concentration of artillery firepower in the European theatre (“more artillery than I thought existed in all of the army,” remembered a passing GI), which broke up every German attack.

The defenders of Elsenborn and Saint Vith looked askance at the attention paid to Bastogne since the Battle of the Bulge ended. The town stole the media's attention, but the static battle for the northern sector of the battlefield was just as important, if less newsworthy. ‘Stationary resistance’ did not make newspaper headlines, although the US divisions in the north stood firm and repelled the Germans' every time.

Skorzeny's commandos, clad in their GI uniforms, caused huge confusion behind the lines, out of all proportion to their numbers, but were soon recalled as the German advance stalled. However, they left behind thousands of trigger-happy nervous GIs, who undoubtedly

KAMPFGRUPPE PEIPER'S TRAIL OF CHAOS

DESPITE BEING HAMPERED BY WEATHER AND STIFF ALLIED RESISTANCE, JOCHEN PEIPER'S ARMoured COLUMN MADE ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL BREAKTHROUGHS OF THE OPERATION

5. ASSAULT AT STAVELOT

Peiper attacks Stavelot on 18 December but is unable to capture the town before the Americans evacuate a large fuel depot. Three tanks try to take the bridge over the River Amblève but the lead vehicle is disabled by a mine. After a fierce tank battle, the Germans finally enter the town after US engineers fail to blow up the bridge.

7. THE FINAL PUSH

At dawn on 19 December, Peiper surprises the US defenders of Stoumont with an attack, capturing the town after a two-hour tank battle. However, Stavelot is soon retaken by the Americans and Peiper is now forced to halt. In the evening, he withdraws to the edge of Stoumont, then withdraws to La Gleize and sets up defences.

6. ROUTE BLOCKED AT TROIS-PONTS

Peiper rushes an advance group towards the vital bridge at Trois-Ponts, leaving the greater part of his strength in Stavelot. The Americans blow up the bridge at 11.30am on 18 December as the Germans arrive. Peiper detours north towards La Gleize but is attacked by US fighter-bombers. This attack destroys tanks and half-tracks, which then block the road. Peiper pauses in the woods near La Gleize.

4. MASSACRE NEAR BAUGNEZ CROSSROADS

At 12.30pm on 17 December, Peiper encounters elements of the Seventh US Armoured Division between the hamlets of Baugnez and Malmedy. The Americans quickly surrender. However, incoming SS troops open fire on the prisoners, causing widespread panic. 113 POWs are gunned down although some manage to escape.

3. FLANKING SOUTH AT BÜLLINGEN

Peiper advances north west to Büllingen with a plan to eventually move west. However, he is unaware that if he turns directly north, he has an opportunity to flank and trap the entire Second and 99th US divisions. Instead, he turns south to detour around Hünningen.

1. A SHAKY START AT LANZERATH

On 16 December, two squads of 18 American troops fight a battalion of German paratroopers during a day-long confrontation. They inflict dozens of casualties on the Germans and bottle up the advance of the SS.

2. THE FUEL DUMP AT HONSFELD

Peiper enters Honsfeld and encounters one of the 99th Division's rest centres, filled with confused US troops. The Germans quickly capture portions of the 394th Infantry Regiment and destroy a number of armoured vehicles and units. Peiper also captures 50,000 gallons of American fuel for his vehicles.

shot many innocent Americans – perhaps five per cent of the total casualties on both sides were from friendly fire. A Volksgrenadier commander, Generalmajor Möhring, driving a captured Jeep, was killed by one of his own men in similar circumstances on 18 December.

The concept of 'the Bulge' into Allied lines (the 'Battle of the Bulge' phrase was coined by *United Press International* reporter Larry Newman on 30 December 1944) is really associated with the performance of Manteuffel's tank formations, which easily outperformed Dietrich's SS, as the Fifth Army's commander had predicted, having better terrain for his armour. Yet he was always behind his tight timetable, as every panzer unit was delayed by the poor equipment of bridging units and the inability of Volksgrenadiers to quickly subdue the route centres of Saint Vith and Bastogne. The latter housed General Troy Middleton's VIII Corps HQ; he left reluctantly, and only on receipt of insistent orders from his First Army commander.

Both towns attracted Manteuffel's forces like iron filings to a magnet. While he needed the roads through them, and deviating around could be costly in men and equipment, the Fifth Army lingered too long in fighting for both. Saint Vith fell a week into the campaign, on 23 December – its robust defence conducted by Brigadier-General Bruce C Clarke of the Seventh Armored Division, who in the process stripped nearly a week out of Manteuffel's timetable.

The Allies react

Eisenhower was in conference with General Omar Bradley in Paris when news of the Ardennes attacks trickled in throughout the 16th. It was only late in the evening that the pair realised they were faced with a full-scale offensive. While Omar Bradley, Ike's fellow student from West Point days and now commander of the US 12th Army Group (First

"BY THE END OF 1944, EISENHOWER HAD COMMITTED 38 ALLIED DIVISIONS TO THE BULGE, BUT THEN THE WEATHER WORSENEDED, ADDING TO THE MISERY OF FRIEND AND FOE ALIKE"

and Third Armies), attended to his forces, Eisenhower deployed his theatre reserves – the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. They had just come out of the line and were enjoying some well-earned leave in Reims, but soon found themselves on the road to the Bulge.

The 82nd were dispatched to the northern shoulder, and the 101st to Bastogne, which is how Major Dick Winters and 'Easy' Company of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment – the subjects of *Band Of Brothers* – came to find themselves in the freezing Bois Jacques woods just outside Bastogne. It was a close-run affair, as their arrival almost coincided with that of the tanks of the Panzer Lehr Division. The Germans were only an hour or two behind.

The parachutists were conveyed to their destinations by fleets of six-wheeled GMC trucks and semi-trailers. Military policemen literally rounded up any transport they could find, had their cargos emptied and sent them off to the airborne units. The men were crammed into the back standing up and moved immediately. Back in the autumn of 1944, when the Allies had outstripped their supply lines, they had improvised the 'Red Ball Express', a one-way continuous circuit of thousands of cargo trucks moving up to the front, which eventually solved their logistics problem. For the Bulge, they repeated the exercise; on 17 December alone, some 11,000 trucks were moving 60,000 men and their combat supplies towards the battle zone.

World War II had become a battle of trucks and fuel; First Army recorded it moved 48,000 vehicles to the Ardennes in the opening week

and Patton at Third Army noted that during the month-long battle, 17 of his divisions were shifted an average distance of 160 kilometres to various points in Belgium and Luxembourg. The Red Ball and Ardennes moves were only possible because of the USA's stupendous manufacturing capability. Once the US Quartermaster Corps had settled on its requirement for a medium 2.5-ton 6x6 truck, 800,000 had been assembled by 1945 – some by Studebaker and International Harvester, but more than 500,000 by the General Motors Corporation (GMC), leading to their inevitable nickname of 'Jimmies'.

The speedy arrival of the 101st Airborne at Bastogne, followed by a hotchpotch of other units, ensured that the Germans wouldn't take the town. Combat supplies and medical personnel parachuted in, or arrived by glider. Keen to press on westwards, towards the distant river Meuse, the Second Panzer Division swarmed around the northern perimeter, while Panzer Lehr trundled around Bastogne's southern limits; in so doing, they surrounded the little Belgian town and its famous siege began. So desperate were the attackers to seize the settlement that the local German general, Baron von Lüttwitz, sent a surrender demand to Bastogne's military commander, Brigadier General Tony McAuliffe of the 101st.

He tried to bluff the Americans into capitulation, although his forces were inferior in numbers and firepower to those of the defenders. All he achieved was a mysterious one-word reply, "Nuts!", which was McAuliffe's favourite word to express frustration. As one



Above: A fallen member of the 101st Airborne Division, killed while fighting in a heavily wooded area near Bastogne, Belgium

A US soldier returns from the frontline in the Bastogne region



US soldiers of the 289th Infantry Regiment march along the road on their way to cut off the Saint Vith-Houffalize road in Belgium, 24 January 1945

officer present later observed, this was a polite way of telling the Germans to "go to Hell". The siege was broken on 26 December in a dramatic dash by Lieutenant Colonel Creighton Adams's 37th Tank Battalion (of Patton's Third Army), although the corridor into the perimeter remained tenuous for several days.

The mist disperses

It was the Second Panzer Division that came closest to reaching the Meuse, when one of its battle groups reached Celles, about five kilometres from the river, on 23 December, but there ran out of fuel. On Christmas Day, the skies cleared, enabling US P-38s, P-51s and rocket-firing RAF Typhoons to pulverise the array of ground targets, easily identifiable in the snow-covered landscape. "A Flak battery that attempted to reply to an attack of P-38 Lightnings simply disappeared under a hail of bombs," noted the divisional war diary.

Allied airpower, of course, was always going to halt Herbstnebel, for the fog and snow wouldn't last indefinitely. The only question was when. In this sense, the end result of the Ardennes attack was inevitable: somewhere along the line of their advance the German war machine would be caught and destroyed by the Allied air fleets, to which they had no antidote.

Fuel was the other German headache, although the routes taken by the various German battle groups were not predicated on the need to capture US fuel dumps, as war movies would have us believe. Fifth Panzer Army managed to take several American dumps, but SS-Colonel Peiper missed capturing 3 million gallons of fuel that was stored in woods near Stavelot because he didn't know it was there. However, the Germans had gasoline available, but it was kept on the home bank of

Above: A Sixth Airborne Division sniper dressed in a snow camouflage suit while on patrol in the Ardennes region

the Rhine for security and deception purposes. Once the attack was launched, the available fuel couldn't be brought forward fast enough, along poor routes, clogged with transport, prisoners, mud and slush. The winding roads and thick snow also increased fuel consumption beyond what had been expected, and ensured that petrol would become an increasing concern throughout the campaign.

Early on, Eisenhower had agreed to divide the Bulge area in two. The British 21st Army Group commander, Montgomery, was to oversee containment of the northern sector of the Bulge, then counterattack. Eisenhower made this decision because the Germans had physically isolated Bradley, the 12th Army Group commander based south of the German penetration in Luxembourg City, from the First US Army, based the other side of the Bulge. Hodges and his First Army thus came under 'Monty', while Bradley retained Patton's Third Army, to which Middleton's VIII Corps was also attached. Although Bradley took this as a slur on his own generalship, those American generals who served under Monty at this time were generally positive about his methods, if not his personality.

The scene was set for the final act in the Ardennes, with the panzer thrusts having culminated, and all German units generally low on fuel, food and ammunition. Meanwhile, General Brian Horrocks had slid elements of his British XXX Corps down along the river Meuse, to stop any Germans from moving further westwards – as if they could. It is often forgotten that Horrocks suffered 1,408 British casualties in this last stage of the fighting, his dead being buried at Hotton. By the end of 1944, Eisenhower had committed 38 Allied divisions to the Bulge, but then the weather worsened, adding to the misery of friend and foe alike. On New Year's Day, an artillery unit recorded temperatures of -11 degrees Celsius, but by 9 January, the mercury had plummeted to -21 degrees Celsius. At this time, Montgomery's forces began their attacks from the west and north, while Patton's Third Army responded likewise impatiently from the south.

By 14 January, the two American armies, Hodges' First advancing from the north and Patton's Third, made contact for the first time at La Roche, and two days later, substantial armoured units from both armies sealed the Bulge at Houffalize. Saint Vith was retaken on 23 January – by which time only three houses remained habitable; the campaign also took the lives of more than 3,000 civilians, maiming countless others. While the casualties for both sides were about even, very little of Hitler's divisions remained. The Allies noted the loss of 733 tanks, but the Wehrmacht had lost 600 irreplaceable panzers, which could have meted out much more severe punishment to the Red Army in their assault on Berlin later in the year. In this sense, the Russians were the true beneficiaries of Herbstnebel, a militarily illogical campaign devised solely by Hitler, and doomed to failure before it had even begun.



An American soldier guards German prisoners

Images: Alamy

Great Battles

BERLIN, GERMANY, 16 APRIL - 2 MAY 1945

BERLIN

Amid the rubble of the Nazi capital, the Soviet Red Army brought the Third Reich to a violent end

The rubble of the recently ended Battle of Berlin, including the shell of a bullet-riddled truck, surrounds the Brandenburg Gate



Above: Willi Hübner, a 16-year-old soldier of the Hitler Youth, receives the Iron Cross 2nd Class for bravery

By the spring of 1945, World War II was in its sixth year. The once mighty war machine of the Third Reich had been brought to its knees. Assailed from both East and West, Nazi Germany was in its death throes.

Since the beginning, Allied forces had been buoyed by the cry, "On to Berlin!" Now, however, practical considerations weighed heavily on the conduct of the final weeks of the war. General Dwight D Eisenhower, supreme commander of the American and British armies advancing across the western German frontier, breached protocol and contacted Soviet Premier Josef Stalin directly, informing him that the Western Allies did not intend to fight for Berlin. For several reasons, both political and military, the battle for the Nazi capital and whatever wisps of glory might come with its capture would be left to the Soviet Red Army.

Indeed, since Hitler had launched Operation Barbarossa – the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 – the Soviets had suffered mightily and borne the brunt of the fighting on the European continent. Millions of Soviet military and civilian lives had been lost before the Nazi juggernaut was even stemmed only 20 kilometres from the Soviet capital of Moscow, Russia. German generals peered at the gleaming onion domes of the city's buildings but could get no closer. Winter set in, and the Germans literally froze to death, while weapons and equipment failed to function in such inhospitable conditions.

The following spring, a renewed German offensive was met by a resurgent Red Army, and then the great Soviet victories at Stalingrad and Kursk occurred in 1943. Seizing the initiative, the Soviets pushed the Germans westward across thousands of kilometres, reaching Warsaw, the Polish capital, in the summer of 1944. Soviet offensives from Leningrad in the north to Odessa in the south were known as 'Stalin's ten blows'. By early 1945, East Prussia, the Baltic States, and Pomerania were in Soviet possession. The Red Army advanced from the River Vistula to the River Oder, and then to within 60 kilometres of Berlin.

Conference at the Kremlin

On 1 April, Stalin and two of his top commanders, Marshal Georgi Zhukov of the 1st Belorussian Front and Marshal Ivan Konev of the 1st Ukrainian Front, met at the Kremlin in Moscow. "Who will take Berlin?" Stalin asked. "We will!" Konev answered. Stalin proceeded to give the two commanders their orders. Zhukov was to attack Berlin from the north and east, while Konev approached from the south. The two immense Fronts would surround Berlin in a giant pincer and destroy the opposing forces in an ever-shrinking defensive perimeter.

Two weeks later, the final offensive began with the thunder of thousands of Soviet guns. Konev's advance across the River Neisse gained ground steadily, but Zhukov failed to accurately assess the strength of the main German line of resistance before Berlin at Seelöw Heights just west of the Oder, where elements of Army Group Vistula, outmanned and outgunned but full of fight and Nazi fervour, made a stand along a ridgeline. Under the command of Colonel

General Gotthard Heinrici, the defenders pulled back from frontline positions just as the Soviet artillery bombardment erupted; therefore, most of the shelling failed to inflict heavy casualties. German tanks and tank-killing infantry squads saw the silhouettes of Red Army armoured vehicles and troops illuminated by their own searchlights and took a fearful toll, stalling Zhukov's advance.

After four days of fierce fighting, Zhukov broke through the Seelöw Heights defences, but the cost was high. No fewer than 30,000 Red Army soldiers were dead, along with 12,000 German troops. Stalin was enraged by the delay and ordered Konev to abandon his wider swing around Berlin and send his armoured spearheads directly towards the city. The existing rivalry between Zhukov and Konev became heated as both commanders vied for the prestige of capturing the Nazi capital.

A memorable birthday

20 April 1945, was Hitler's 56th birthday, but there was little revelry in the Führerbunker beneath the Reich Chancellery in Berlin that day. Soviet long-range artillery began shelling the capital, and the guns would not cease firing until the city had fallen. Word reached the Führer in his subterranean command centre that three defensive lines east of Berlin had been breached, including Seelöw Heights. Zhukov was advancing. Konev was in open country and moving steadily with the 4th Guards Tank Army and 3rd Guards Army leading the way. A third Red Army Front, the 2nd Belorussian under Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky, had broken through the 3rd Panzer Army's lines. Inside Berlin, the remnants of Army and Waffen-SS units prepared makeshift defences. Old men and boys joined these soldiers for a fight to the death once the Soviets entered the city.

Territorial gains brought Berlin within range of field artillery on 22 April. A Red Army news correspondent came upon several guns preparing to unleash a storm of shells on the German capital. He later wrote, "What are the targets?" I asked the battery commander. 'Centre of Berlin, Spree bridges, and the northern Stettin railway stations,' he answered. Then came the tremendous words of command: 'Open fire on the capital of Fascist Germany.' I noted the time. It was exactly 8.30am on 22 April. 96 shells fell on the centre of Berlin in the course of a few minutes."

Both Zhukov and Konev ordered a continued westward advance, and on 25 April, the leading elements of a Guards rifle regiment from the 1st Ukrainian Front made contact with troops of the US 69th Infantry Division at Torgau on the River Elbe, splitting the Third Reich in two. On the same day, the encirclement of Berlin was completed. Both the German 9th and 4th Panzer Armies were surrounded, and efforts by the 12th Army under General Walther Wenck to move to the relief of Berlin were thwarted by the westward movement of the 1st Ukrainian Front.

Defending the doomed

As the Soviet noose tightened around Berlin, probing attacks tested the city's defences. The Germans had divided three concentric rings into nine sectors. About 96.5 kilometres in circumference, the outermost ring ran across

**"AS THE SOVIET NOOSE
TIGHTENED AROUND BERLIN,
PROBING ATTACKS TESTED
THE CITY'S DEFENCES"**

the outskirts of the capital. Flimsy at best, it consisted primarily of roadblocks, barricades of rubble and vehicles, and shallow trenches. It was compromised rapidly in numerous locations prior to the main assault on the city.

The second circle ran approximately 40 kilometres and made use of existing buildings and obstacles, including the S-Bahn, Berlin's public transportation railway system. The inner ring included the massive buildings that once housed the ministries and departments of the Nazi government. These were turned into machine-gun and anti-tank strongpoints with firing positions on each floor.

Six massive flak towers, studded with guns and virtually impervious to anything but a direct hit, were also part of the inner circle. Eight of the pie-shaped dividing sectors, labelled A through H and radiating from the centre of Berlin, crossed each of the rings to the outer perimeter. The ninth sector, named Z, was manned partially by a fanatical contingent of Hitler's personal SS guard.

The city of Berlin itself comprised 547 square kilometres, and defensive positions along the barriers of the River Spree and the Landwehr and Teltow Canals were particularly fortified. The main objective of the converging Soviet forces was the complex of government buildings known as the Citadel, north and east of the Tiergarten, a large park and residential district that was home to the Berlin Zoo.

Estimates of German strength vary from roughly 100,000 to 180,000, including SS, Army, Volkssturm (People's Militia), and Hitler Youth, under the command of General Helmuth Weidling, appointed by the Führer on 23 April to lead the last gasp defence.

Embattled Berlin

On 26 April, the final chapter of the battle for Berlin began with a fury. The 8th Guards and 1st Guards Tank Armies fought their way through the second defensive circle, crossing the S-Bahn line and attacking Tempelhof Airport. To the west, elements of the 1st Belorussian Front entered Charlottenburg and drew up to the River Spree after two days of bitter combat. The Soviets advanced inexorably toward the centre of Berlin on four primary axes, along the Frankfurter Allee from the southeast, Sonnenallee from the south toward the Belle-Alliance-Platz, again from the south toward the Potsdamer Platz, and from the north toward the Reichstag, where the German Parliament had once convened and which had not been in use since a devastating fire had gutted the building in 1933.

On 28 April, the Potsdamerstrasse Bridge across the Landwehr Canal was taken, and fighting spread into the Tiergarten. The next morning the 3rd Shock Army crossed the Moltke Bridge over the River Spree. The Reichstag lay to the left fronting the Königsplatz, which was mined and heavily defended by machine-gun nests, artillery, several tanks, and a mixed bag of roughly 6,000 Germans. Attacks on the Interior Ministry building progressed sluggishly, and by dawn on 30 April, Red Army soldiers occupied Gestapo headquarters on Prinz Albrechtstrasse for a brief time before a heavy counterattack pushed them out. The Soviets did capture most of the diplomatic quarter that day.

 OPPOSING FORCES 			
SOVIET RED ARMY		GERMAN ARMY	
 MARSHAL GEORGI ZHUKOV, 1ST BELORUSSIAN FRONT	 MARSHAL IVAN KONEV, 1ST UKRAINIAN FRONT	 GENERAL HELMUTH WEIDLING	 COLONEL GENERAL GOTTHARD HEINRICI
 6,250 TANKS	 2,700 AIRCRAFT	 10,400 TANKS	 3,300 AIRCRAFT
 2.5 MILLION TROOPS	 41,600 GUNS	 1 MILLION TROOPS	 1,500 GUNS



Above: Soldiers raise the flag of the Soviet Union above the Reichstag in a symbolic gesture of the fall of Berlin

Meanwhile, the 79th Rifle Corps began a concerted effort to take the Reichstag. Troops of the 150th Rifle Division ran a gauntlet of fire across the Königsplatz in a frontal assault. Other divisions attacked the flanks of the large building, and three attempts were beaten back between 4.30am and 1pm. The defenders were aided by 128mm guns atop one of the reinforced concrete flak towers at the Berlin Zoo firing from over a kilometre away. Soviet tanks and self-propelled assault guns lumbered into

the Königsplatz to blast German positions. A false report that a red banner had been seen flying above the Reichstag was issued at mid-afternoon when the attackers had managed to advance only partially across the Königsplatz. Fearing the repercussions that might ensue if the report were found to be inaccurate, Major General VM Shatilov, commanding the 150th Rifle Division, ordered a redoubling of the effort.

By 6pm, the fight for the Reichstag had raged 14 hours. Soviet soldiers renewed the attack,



In this July 1945 photo, a heavily damaged street near the Unter den Linden in the centre of Berlin remains devastated



Pressed into service, a soldier of the Volkssturm holds a Panzerschreck anti-tank weapon on the outskirts of Berlin



2nd Lt William Robertson, US Army, and Lt Alexander Sylvashko, Red Army, shown in front of an East Meets West sign symbolising the historic meeting of the Soviet and US Armies, near Torgau, Germany

carrying small mortars to blast open entryways that had been covered with brick and mortar. Once inside, the Soviets clashed with Germans in hand-to-hand combat throughout the building. A small group of Red Army soldiers worked their way around the back of the Reichstag and found a stairway to the roof. Sergeants Mikhail Yegorov and Meliton Kantaria rushed forward with a red banner and found an equestrian statue at the edge of the roofline. Minutes before 11pm, they jammed the staff into a space in the statue.

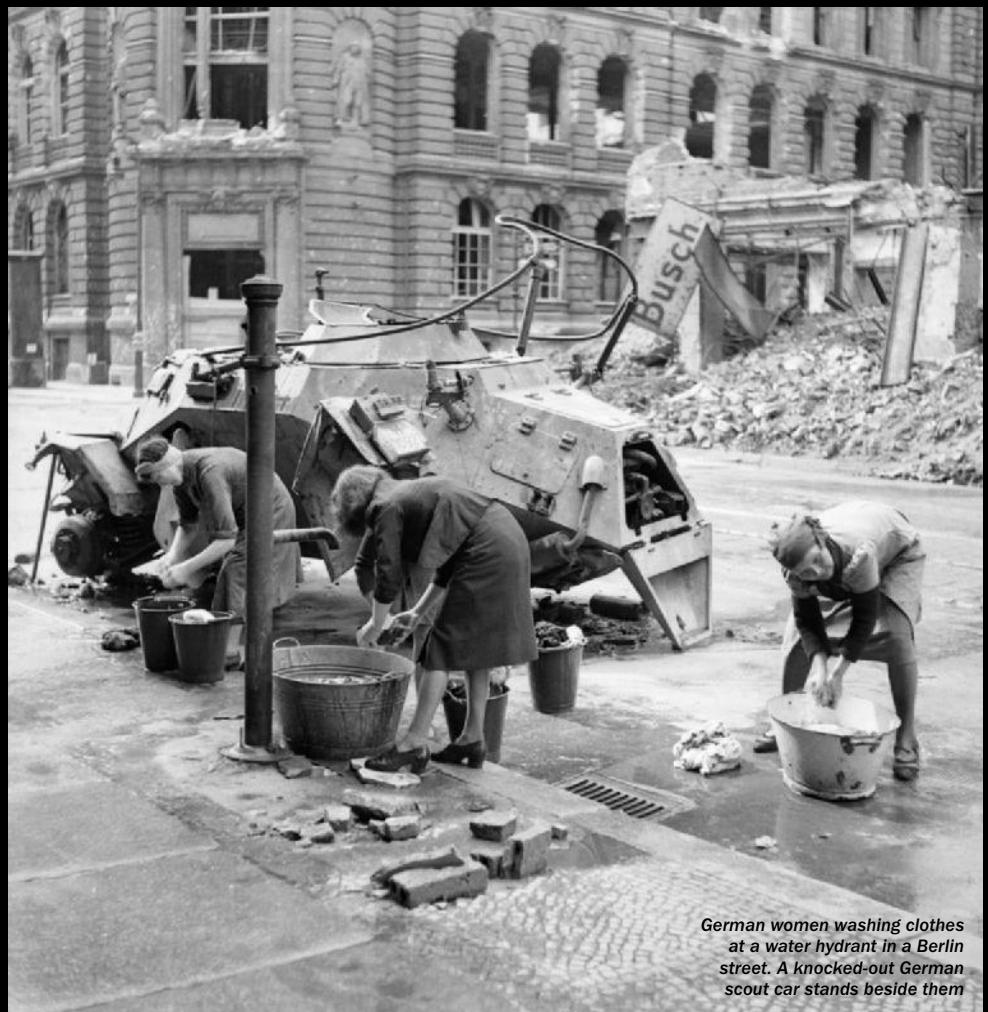
Although the hammer and sickle flag of the Soviet Union flew above the Reichstag on the night of 30 April, the building was not secured until 2 May, when the last 2,500 German defenders surrendered. The famed photos and footage of the flag raising were actually taken during a reenactment of the event on 3 May.

Crumbling centre

The Germans still forlornly defending Berlin were exhausted and running low on ammunition. General Weidling informed Hitler on the morning of 30 April that in a matter of hours the Red Army would be in control of the centre of the city.

The Soviet 5th Shock, 8th Guards, and 8th Guards Tank Armies advanced down the famed Unter den Linden, approaching the Reich Chancellery and the Führerbunker. Hitler authorised General Weidling to attempt a breakout from the encirclement that had formed, and then with his longtime mistress, Eva Braun, who had become his wife only hours earlier, committed suicide in the underground labyrinth.

By this time, only about 10,000 resolute German soldiers remained in defensive positions, and Soviet troops and tanks were closing in from all sides. Soviet artillery pounded



German women washing clothes at a water hydrant in a Berlin street. A knocked-out German scout car stands beside them

the remaining defenders, relentlessly shelling the Air Ministry building on the Wilhelmstrasse, a strong position that had been reinforced with steel, concrete, and barricades. The 3rd Shock Army advanced along the northern edge of the Tiergarten and battled a cluster of German tanks while maintaining pressure on the Reichstag and the surrounding area. In concert with the movement of the 8th Guards Army, the 3rd Shock Army cut the centre of Berlin in half.

On 1 May, General Hans Krebs, chief of the German General Staff, contacted General Vasily Chuikov, commander of the 8th Guards Army, informing the Soviet officer of Hitler's death and hoping to arrange surrender terms. The attempt failed when Chuikov insisted on unconditional surrender and Krebs responded that he did not have such authority. Meanwhile, some of the German troops began attempting to break out of embattled Berlin, particularly toward the west and a hopeful surrender to British or American forces rather than the vengeful Soviets, whose people had suffered so much at the hands of the Nazis. Only a relative few succeeded after crossing the Charlottenbrücke Bridge over the River Havel. Many were killed or captured when they abruptly encountered Soviet lines.

On the morning of 2 May, Red Army troops took control of the Reich Chancellery. Weidling had already sent a communiqué to General Chuikov at 1am, asking for another meeting. The German general was instructed to come to the Potsdamer Bridge at 6am. He was then taken to Chuikov's headquarters and surrendered within the hour. Weidling issued orders for all German troops to follow suit and put the directive in writing at Chuikov's request. He also made a recording of the order, and Soviet trucks blared the message through the shattered streets of the city. Some pockets of diehard SS troops resisted until they were annihilated. At the troublesome Berlin Zoo flak tower, 350 haggard German soldiers stumbled into the daylight of defeat. The Battle of Berlin was over.

Counting the cost

Casualties were staggering. During the drive from the Oder to Berlin, at least 81,000 Soviet soldiers had died and well over a quarter million were wounded. German losses are estimated at 100,000 killed, 220,000 wounded, and nearly half a million taken prisoner. At least 100,000 civilian residents of Berlin, some of whom committed suicide, had also perished.

Red Army soldiers raped and murdered countless German women. They destroyed and pillaged in retribution for the horrors previously inflicted on their Motherland by the Nazis. For some Berliners who survived the battle, the nightmare of Soviet vengeance was – perhaps – a fate worse than death.

Within a week of the fall of Berlin, World War II in Europe ended with the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany. The Third Reich, which Hitler boasted would last 1,000 years, had ended in fiery ruin in only 12.

“AT LEAST 100,000 CIVILIAN RESIDENTS OF BERLIN HAD ALSO PERISHED”

BERLIN 1945

1. FROM ENCIRCLEMENT TO ATTACK

On 26 April, Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front advances west of the city's centre to Charlottenburg and northeast of the Tiergarten to the River Spree and the Moabit District. Two days of bitter combat are indicative of the tenacity of the German defenders.

4. ACROSS THE SPREE

In the early morning hours of 29 April, Soviet soldiers seize the Moltke Bridge, the last remaining intact structure across the River Spree. The position facilitates the assault on the diplomatic quarter and the Interior Ministry.

2. FORMIDABLE FLAK TOWERS

In the southwest corner of the Tiergarten near the Berlin Zoo, flak towers rain fire on advancing Soviet troops, shooting down on them from the concrete structures. One of these towers holds out until the bitter end on 2 May.

3. CROSSING THE CANAL

Despite Soviet shelling and German attempts to destroy it, Soviet troops capture the bridge on Potsdamerstrasse across the Landwehr Canal on 28 April, gaining a vantage point from which to mount the first attacks against the stronghold at the Berlin Zoo.

8. SURRENDER AND SUBJUGATION

On the morning of 2 May, General Helmuth Weidling meets Soviet soldiers at the Potsdamer Bridge and surrenders to General Vasily Chuikov shortly thereafter. Some of the defenders of Berlin attempt to break out of the encirclement to the west. However, most are killed or forced to surrender.

7. TO THE REICH CHANCELLERY

After reaching the Potsdam rail station and moving across Lanbergerstrasse to the east on 1 May, Soviet troops advance along the Unter den Linden toward the Reich Chancellery, occupying the structure early the following morning. They also discover the Führerbunker and the charred remains of Hitler and Eva Braun.

6. ASSAULTING THE REICHSTAG

On 30 April, the Soviet 79th Rifle Corps, commanded by Major General SI Perevertkin, begin a series of assaults on the Reichstag, which commands the Königsplatz. Late that evening, soldiers scramble to the roof of the building and plant the Soviet flag there. The building is secured on 2 May.

5. HITLER COMMITS SUICIDE

Deep beneath the Reich Chancellery, Hitler commits suicide in the Führerbunker at 3.30pm on 30 April. Eva Braun, his longtime mistress whom he married hours earlier, dies with the Führer. Their corpses are doused with gasoline and set aflame in the garden of the Reich Chancellery.

END OF AN ERA

Hitler's reign of terror finally came to an end with his death in April 1945, but what led to the collapse of the Third Reich and the end for Nazi Germany's depraved dictator?

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The Führer's final moments in his Berlin bunker

134 HITLER'S GREATEST STRATEGIC MISTAKES
Explore Hitler's biggest military blunders

140 WHAT IF... HITLER HAD TAKEN MOSCOW?
How a Soviet defeat would have changed history



"OPERATION BARBAROSSA WAS THE MOMENT WHEN HITLER'S HUBRIS COST HIM THE REICH. HIS DECISION TO INVADE THE USSR WENT ON TO COST 4.3 MILLION GERMAN LIVES"



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TWILIGHT IN THE FÜHRERBUNKER

Deep in the Führerbunker, Adolf Hitler perished along with his dream of Nazi world domination amid the rubble and destruction of Berlin

His hands trembled. He slumped noticeably and shuffled as he walked. His eyes were often glassy. Adolf Hitler was a broken man.

A chemical cocktail of Benzedrine and eye drops laced with cocaine kept him functioning during the day. Barbiturates were needed for fitful sleep. He suffered from severe stomach pain and probably the onset of Parkinson's Disease. The once vibrant Führer of Nazi Germany hovered in the gloaming of emotional hysteria, blind rage and catatonic dejection.

In the spring of 1945, Hitler's physical and mental states were a microcosm of the

destruction that surrounded him in the dying Nazi capital of Berlin. His once powerful war machine and totalitarian regime were being crushed under the weight of Allied military might. The Americans and British were closing in from the West. Worse still, his mortal enemy, the Soviet Union, had unleashed the Red Army, filled with hate and retribution for all things German, against his crumbling defences. For nearly two years, the inexorable Soviet tide had pushed German forces steadily westward more than 1,600 kilometres. Now, the enemy had reached Berlin's doorstep intent on crashing through and conquering the black heart of the Third Reich.

As early as January 1945, under the rain of heavy Allied bombing, Hitler and his entourage had retreated underground to the relative safety of the Führerbunker, 15 metres beneath the garden of the Reich Chancellery amid a cluster of administrative buildings near Berlin's Königsplatz that was known as the Citadel. With him, either in the bunker or nearby, as the Soviets encircled the city and converged from several directions were Doctor Ludwig Stumpfegger, one-time physician to Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler and now in Hitler's service, Hitler's personal secretary Martin Bormann, Günther Schwägermann, adjutant to Minister of Propaganda Doctor

Josef Goebbels, Undersecretary of State for the Ministry of Propaganda Werner Naumann, Hitler's adjutant Otto Günsche, his valet Heinz Linge, chauffeur Erich Kempka, secretary Traudl Junge, and several others.

In early April, Eva Braun, Hitler's mistress for more than a decade, travelled north from Munich, determined to be with him to the bitter end. She was not summoned to join the Führer. In fact, Hitler attempted to persuade her to leave Berlin. She would have none of it and descended into the dank, shadowy existence.

Underground fortress

The Führerbunker was a masterpiece of German practicality and engineering. Although not luxurious by any means, it was functional. Construction was completed in two phases, the first in 1936, and the second in 1944. The upper level, called the Vorbunker, was topped by a concrete reinforced roof four metres thick. Four of the Vorbunker's 12 chambers were completed as kitchen space, and at the end of a long central hallway a spiral staircase led down to the lower level, where another 18 small rooms were built. Hitler and Eva Braun occupied six of these to the left off the main corridor, while close members of the Führer's staff used others. Additional rooms housed communications equipment and machinery for the ventilation system, its shrill, monotonous whine pervading the entire structure.

The long passage on the lower level also served as a 5.5-square-metre conference



Above: Hitler and Hermann Göring visit defenders of Berlin as the Red Army approaches in early April 1945

“THE FÜHRERBUNKER WAS A MASTERPIECE OF GERMAN PRACTICALITY AND ENGINEERING. ALTHOUGH NOT LUXURIOUS BY ANY MEANS, IT WAS FUNCTIONAL”

The Goebbels family posed for this photo in happier times before its fateful descent into the Führerbunker



room, where a large map covered a heavy wooden table and Hitler held daily briefings on the deteriorating military situation. Near the entrance to the Führerbunker, a battalion of 700 soldiers of the SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, the Führer's personal bodyguard, were quartered. They worked as guards, couriers, telephone operators, clerks, and servants inside the Führerbunker.

On 22 April, Doctor Goebbels, his wife Magda, an ardent Nazi, and their six children, five girls and a boy ranging in age from four to 12, came to the bunker. Goebbels took a room on the lower level, while Magda and the children moved into four rooms in the Vorbunker. The children would never see daylight again. A few days later, Magda wrote to Luftwaffe Lieutenant Harald Quandt, her son from an earlier marriage, who had been taken prisoner in North Africa.

"My beloved son!" she scrawled. "By now we have been in the Führerbunker for six days already – daddy, your six little siblings and I, for the sake of giving our National Socialistic lives the only possible honourable end... You shall know that I stayed here against daddy's will, and that even last Sunday the Führer wanted to help me to get out. You know your mother – we have the same blood, for me there was no wavering. Our glorious idea is ruined and with it everything beautiful and marvellous that I have known in my life. The world that comes after the Führer and National Socialism is no longer worth living in and therefore I took the children with me, for they are too good for the life that would follow, and a merciful God will understand me when I will give them the salvation..."

Reversals of fortune

Meanwhile, from early April the news from the frontlines had been continually disheartening. The only glimmer of hope had faded quickly. On the morning of 13 April, Goebbels informed Hitler that US President Franklin D Roosevelt was dead. Surely, the propaganda minister urged, this was a sign of divine providence. The end of the month would herald a turnaround in German fortunes on the battlefield, and Berlin would be saved. But it was not to be. Goebbels confessed, "Perhaps fate has again been cruel and made fools of us."

On 16 April, two Red Army Fronts, more than 2.5 million soldiers, initiated the final offensive to capture Berlin. Four days later, Soviet artillery began to systematically pound the city. Hitler observed his sombre 56th birthday by leaving the safety of the bunker long enough to present Iron Crosses to several boys of the Hitler Youth who had displayed courage while fighting the Soviets. Hitler patted the cheeks of the young Nazis and told them in a voice barely above a whisper that they were good and brave boys. The Führer cut the figure of a doomed man, a wool greatcoat draped over his

"EVEN HITLER'S OLDEST AND CLOSEST ASSOCIATES WERE FALLING AWAY"

THE GOOD NAZI?

Albert Speer, Hitler's architect and Reich Minister of Armaments, was one of the closest associates of the Führer to live into old age. He once commented on his special relationship with Hitler, stating that if the Führer truly had a close friend, then he was indeed that person. Speer joined the Nazi Party in 1931 and rose to prominence as his architectural skills gained notice. He was tried at Nuremberg and convicted of war crimes. Sentenced to 20 years in prison, he served every day and was released at midnight 1 October 1966.

Observers speculated that Speer avoided the hangman's noose because he was articulate and was the only senior Nazi official to express any regret or responsibility for the atrocities of Hitler's regime, although he never admitted any knowledge of the Holocaust, the systematic programme of genocide against Jews and other peoples deemed "Untermensch" or subhuman. Speer's Nazi-era construction projects and wartime armament factories had run on the backs of slave labour. Thousands of prisoners died during his years as armaments minister. After his release from prison, Speer became a darling of the media, penned his bestselling memoir *Inside The Third Reich*, and died in London in 1981 at the age of 76.



Above: A close confidant of Adolf Hitler, Albert Speer served 20 years in prison and lived until 1981

Hitler's personal Secretary Martin Bormann was believed to have escaped from Berlin, but his remains were later identified





Above: Loyal to Hitler to the end, Eva Braun chose to die with the Führer rather than escape from Berlin

stooped shoulders as he attempted to control his palsy before the newsreel camera that recorded the event.

During his daily military conferences, Hitler often became delusional, issuing orders for high-ranking officers who were dead or missing to move armies that no longer existed to the relief of Berlin. During a conference on 22 April, the Führer exploded in a tirade. As he slowly absorbed the fact that his orders for a counterattack against the Soviets were impossible to execute, blaming the catastrophic defeat of Germany on his traitorous and weak-willed generals and the lack of National Socialist fervour among the German people, a people who deserved their fate.

The following day, Minister of Armaments Albert Speer visited the bunker and spoke with the Führer. There had been talk of an escape from Berlin, flying to Obersalzberg and possibly even carrying on the fight. However, Hitler discounted this option and seemed resigned to his own doom. He had already given permission for those who wished to leave the bunker and attempt to escape embattled Berlin to do so.

"That day he said nothing more of an imminent turning point or that there was still hope," Speer later wrote. "Rather apathetically, wearily and if it were already a matter of course, he began speaking of his death... 'I shall not fight personally. There is always the danger that I would only be wounded and fall into the hands of the Russians alive. I don't want my enemies to disgrace my body either. I've given orders that I be cremated. Fraülein Braun wants to depart this life with me... Believe me, Speer, it is easy for me to end my life. A brief moment, and I'm freed of everything, liberated from this painful existence.' I felt as if I had been talking to a man already departed. The atmosphere grew increasingly uncanny; the tragedy was nearing its end."

No honour among thieves

On the afternoon of Speer's visit, Bormann stalked into Hitler's presence with a message from Luftwaffe chief Reichsmarshal Hermann Göring, temporarily safe at Berchtesgaden in the Bavarian Alps. In 1941, Hitler had issued an order authorising Göring to take control of the German government in the event that the Führer was unable to exercise supreme authority. At this dire hour, Göring launched a bid for power saying, "My Führer... If no reply is received by 10 o'clock tonight, I shall take it for granted that you have lost your freedom of action and shall consider the conditions of your decree fulfilled..."

Hitler was apoplectic. He screamed for Göring's arrest, stripped him of his titles and rank, and dictated a response that his former deputy had committed high treason. Even his oldest and closest associates were falling away. Speer remembered, "An outburst of wild fury... in which feelings of bitterness, helplessness, self-pity, and despair mingled."

Insult was heaped upon injury when Himmler, frequently referred to as "faithful Heinrich", was revealed by British news reports to have been carrying on separate negotiations with the Allies through Swedish diplomatic channels. Ordering Himmler's immediate arrest, Hitler railed against the SS leader and retaliated



Above: Hitler, pictured with Eva Braun and their dogs, ordered a cyanide capsule tested on his Alsatian, Blondi, as others were distributed to members of his inner circle



Above: This picture depicts two versions of a photograph of Adolf Hitler that was retouched by an artist of the United States Secret Service in 1944 in order to show how Hitler may disguise himself to escape capture after Germany's defeat

by having SS Lieutenant General Hermann Fegelein, Himmler's liaison in the Führerbunker and Eva Braun's brother-in-law, summarily shot.

After firing Göring, Hitler appointed General Robert Ritter von Greim as commander of the Luftwaffe and asked the officer to come to Berlin to receive a promotion to field marshal. Famed Nazi test pilot Hanna Reitsch and Greim were lovers, and the pair boarded a small plane on the night of 26 April in response to the order. Flying so low that Soviet ground fire actually wounded Greim in the foot, Reitsch landed the aircraft in a Berlin street near the Unter den Linden a short distance from the Reich Chancellery.

As Greim met with the Führer, Reitsch begged to fly Hitler to safety. He refused. She also approached Magda Goebbels, offering to take the children out of the city. "My God! Frau Goebbels, the children cannot stay here!" she pleaded to no avail. Tempelhof Airport, south of the Citadel, fell to the Soviets that day. There would be no further opportunity for any larger aircraft to mount rescue efforts. At first professing their own desire to remain in the Führerbunker until the end, Reitsch and Greim spent three days there until Greim had recovered sufficiently to travel.

Götterdämmerung

By 28 April, the Red Army was only a mile from the Reich Chancellery. Soviet soldiers were methodically destroying the desperate defenders of Berlin, many of them old men of the Volkssturm and boys of the Hitler Youth who

died side-by-side with the beleaguered veterans of General Helmuth Weidling's LVI Panzer Corps. Unit cohesion was rapidly eroding.

In the damp confines of the Führerbunker, as bits of concrete and dust fell from the ceiling with every shuddering impact of a Soviet shell, the atmosphere took on an air of impending doom, the climax of a Wagnerian opera. The Nazi Götterdämmerung, the Twilight of the Gods, was nearly at hand. Word was received that Benito Mussolini, former Fascist dictator of Italy, and his mistress Claretta Petacci, had been shot by partisans and their bodies strung up by the heels in front of a garage in the city of Milan.

Hitler realised that time was short and handed cyanide capsules to those who remained in the Führerbunker. Some questioned whether the poison was potent enough to do the job. Hitler called for his dog, Blondi, an Alsatian given to him as a puppy in 1941. A capsule was crushed between Blondi's teeth, and the dog died instantly.

Late that night, Hitler began to dictate his last will and two-part testament to Junge. Among other things, he appointed Admiral Karl Dönitz to lead what was left of the Third Reich after his own death. He blamed the war on international Jewry. "It is untrue," he said, "that I or anyone else in Germany wanted the war in 1939. It was desired and instigated exclusively by those... statesmen who were either of Jewish descent or worked for Jewish interests."

While Hitler ranted much of the same anti-Semitic drivel he had first published in his book *Mein Kampf* in the 1920s, others in the Führerbunker began to discuss openly the most efficient form of suicide, poison or pistol shot. They began to smoke, something that

Hitler had previously forbidden in his presence. Available alcohol flowed more freely, and for some drunkenness fostered false bravado. Others laughed, sobbed, and slept.

A few minutes after midnight on 29 April, an event took place that few individuals close to Hitler or Eva Braun believed would ever happen. A low-level Nazi Party official was pulled from the nearby front line and hustled to the Führerbunker to officiate in a hasty, macabre ceremony. Hitler and Braun attested to their Aryan lineage, Goebbels and Bormann served as witnesses, and the couple were joined in marriage. A reception followed, and the attendees drank champagne and talked of better days.

Around 2.30am, on 30 April, Hitler said final farewells to some members of his staff. At noon, his final military briefing brought nothing new – only confirmation of the inevitable. Two hours later, he ate his final meal, a vegetarian lunch. Hitler and Eva then spent a few moments with Goebbels, Bormann, and others of their inner circle. They retired to their private quarters shortly after 3pm.

Within minutes, a single shot rang out. Junge was playing with the Goebbels children at the time, and one of them shouted, "That was a direct hit!" After waiting a few minutes, Rochus Misch, a member of Hitler's SS bodyguard, entered the room. He recalled, "Heinz Linge took me to one side, and we went in. I saw Hitler slumped by the table. I didn't see any

"IN A FLASH THE BODIES OF THE FORMER FÜHRER OF GERMANY AND HIS WIFE WERE BLAZING"

Ruins of the Führerbunker are shown in 1947 after the Soviet attempt to destroy the complex



blood on his head. I saw Eva with her knees drawn up lying next to him on the sofa..." Hitler lay dead from a self-inflicted bullet wound to his right temple. Eva had taken cyanide and died swiftly.

Kempka had returned only moments before from a foray into the open to gather 170 litres of petrol to douse the bodies and set them alight as instructed. As Stumpfegger and Linge carried Hitler's lifeless body up the stairs and into the garden, Bormann followed with Eva's corpse over his shoulder. While Soviet artillery shells fell nearby, the cremation detail worked as rapidly as possible. Kempka, Linge, and Günsche emptied numerous cans of fuel on the bodies. Linge lit a rag found lying nearby, and in a flash the bodies of the former Führer of Germany and his wife were blazing.

With Hitler dead, the situation unravelled in the Führerbunker. Some of his cohorts scrambled away, hoping to escape the clutches of the Soviets, who would discover the charred remains of the Führer and Eva Braun buried in a shellhole within a few hours.

With the assistance of a doctor, Magda Goebbels sedated and then poisoned her children on the night of 1 May. When the children were dead, Josef and Magda reportedly took cyanide, their deaths assured by pistol shots to the head from a trusted aide. Josef had joked that he would walk up to the garden before killing himself so that others would not have to carry his body up the stairs.

After the melodrama of death and destruction played out in the Führerbunker, the Third Reich lingered a few more days. World War II in Europe ended with the surrender of Germany on 7 May 1945, but the horrific legacy of Hitler and the Nazis will remain a stain on human history forever.

FATE OF THE FÜHRERBUNKER

During a four-year campaign from 1945 to 1949 to eradicate all public evidence of the Nazi era, the Soviet government destroyed many prominent buildings of the period, including the heavily damaged Reich Chancellery. However, the Soviet attempt to blow up the Führerbunker in December 1947 was only partially successful as outer walls were demolished but little else sustained damage. In 1959, the East German government also conducted operations to destroy the underground structure.

Then, the existence of the Führerbunker, located near the infamous Berlin Wall, was obscured by the shadow of the Cold War barrier. After the fall of the Communist Bloc, a renewal of development and construction projects was

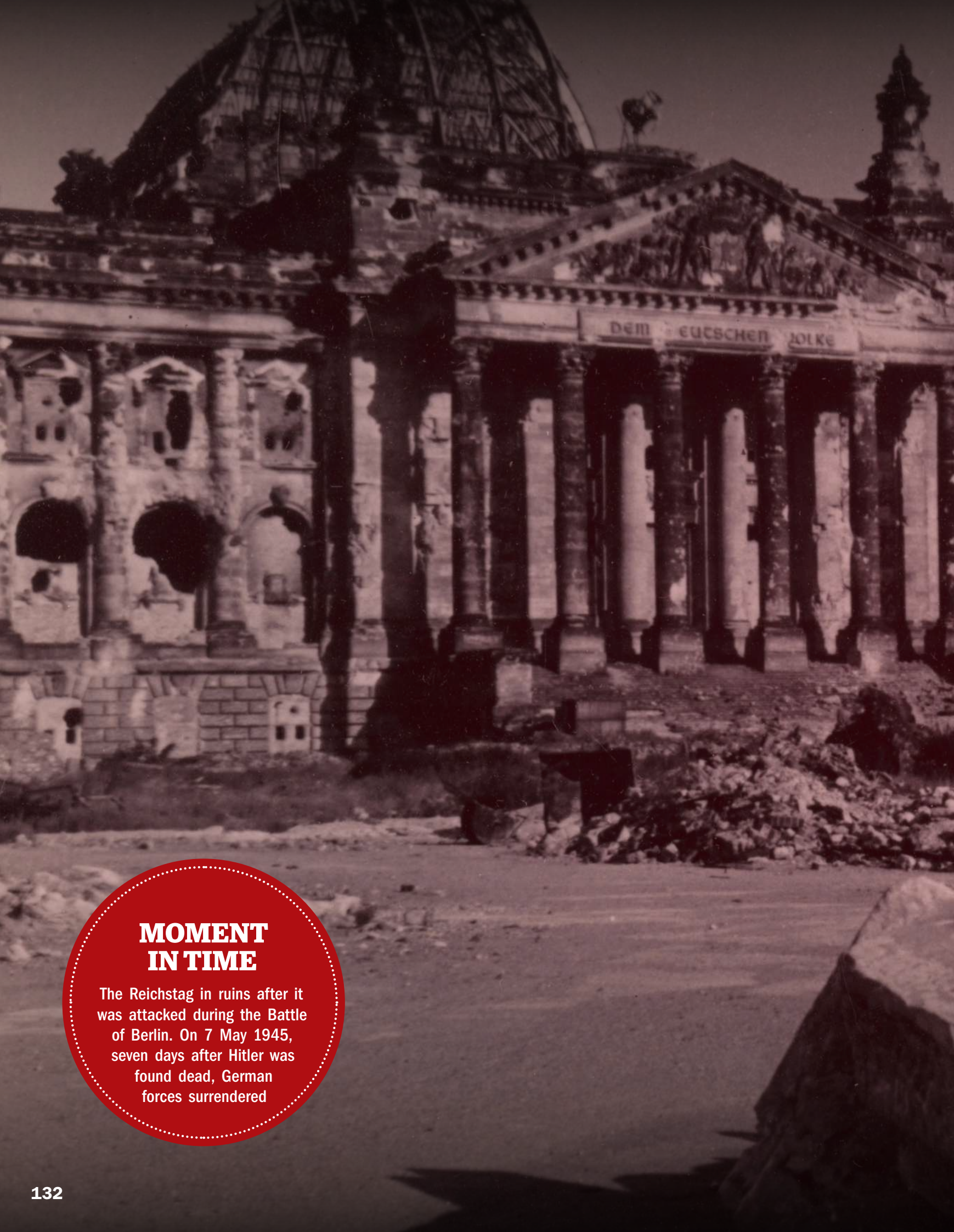
undertaken in Berlin. During excavations for a residential housing complex in 1988, workers uncovered some portions of the old Führerbunker complex.

Much of the remaining structure was then completely destroyed. However, the memory of the Führerbunker and the Nazi era never completely faded. Prior to hosting the FIFA World Cup football tournament in 2006, the German government erected an informational display board that included a diagram of the Führerbunker and the story of its historical context.

89-year-old Rochus Misch, a surviving member of Hitler's SS bodyguard, attended the dedication ceremony on 8 June 2006.



Above: The location of the Führerbunker, where Hitler met death in 1945, is commemorated with an information board erected in 2006



MOMENT IN TIME

The Reichstag in ruins after it was attacked during the Battle of Berlin. On 7 May 1945, seven days after Hitler was found dead, German forces surrendered





HITLER'S GREATEST STRATEGIC MISTAKES

From the beaches of Dunkirk to the frozen fields
of the USSR, discover how Hitler was the author
of his own defeat



In June 1940, the Third Reich was at the height of its powers. The German Army had overrun Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, Denmark, the Low Countries and France. In conjunction with his fascist ally Mussolini, Hitler controlled the vast majority of continental Europe. Within seven years of taking power in Germany and less than a year after World War I had broken out, Hitler strode over Europe like a colossus. Yet the scale and rapidity of early German successes bred a fatal overconfidence and hubris in the Führer. Hitler thought that he could do no wrong, but he was wrong.

Hitler's only military experience was as a lance corporal in the trenches of World War I, running messages between headquarters and the front. He had no experience of command, but that did not stop him appointing himself First Soldier of the German Reich when war broke out in 1939.

Hitler's approach to war was that of an enthusiastic amateur. He scrutinised orders, from high command right down to regimental level, often changing instructions despite the protest of the officers who wrote them. His interventions made little difference during the blitzkrieg in Eastern Europe and the Battle of France, but when German attacks began to fail, Hitler only interfered even more. If his generals dared to contradict him too often, he replaced them.

Had Hitler listened to his more experienced commanders, he may have avoided three key strategic errors. It was Hitler's blundering that allowed Britain to fight on, brought the USA into the war prematurely, and killed millions in an unrealistic invasion of the USSR. Had the Führer avoided these mistakes, he might not have ended the war holed up in a Berlin bunker with the Reich in tatters around him.



DUNKIRK HALT ORDER

BRITAIN LIVES TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY AFTER THE FÜHRER MYSTERIOUSLY STOPS HIS ARMY FROM PURSUING THEM TO DUNKIRK

In ten days, from 26 May to 4 June 1940, 338,226 men escaped the clutches of the Nazi army when they were swept off the beaches at Dunkirk by an eclectic fleet of Royal Navy ships, civilian fishing boats and pleasure cruisers that bravely crossed the Channel. Britain lived on to fight another day thanks to the spirit of Dunkirk. Or so the story goes. In truth, what Winston Churchill described as a “miracle of deliverance” was actually a mistake on the part of the Führer.

The British Expeditionary Force and its French allies had been steadily pushed back during the Battle of France by the German Army, which advanced at breakneck speed. In little more than three weeks, the Allies found themselves bottled up in a pocket around Lille.

On 24 May, Hitler visited General Gerd von Rundstedt, who requested that the tanks pursuing the Allies be halted to allow the Germans to consolidate their positions. At

11.42, Hitler approved the halt order and it was not lifted until the evening of 26 May. Those three days of relative peace offered a window for British and French soldiers to race to the coast at Dunkirk. By preventing his panzers from cutting off or harassing the retreat – when the halt order was issued, some armoured units were closer to Dunkirk than most of the Allied troops – Hitler allowed the improbable evacuation to go ahead.

Why did Hitler allow the halt? In 1945, he suggested that he gave the British a chance to evacuate in “a sporting spirit”, as part of a plan to come to diplomatic terms with Britain. This, however, makes little sense – if Hitler wanted Churchill to accept a truce, it would have been better to destroy his ability to fight. More likely is that Hitler agreed with Rundstedt that the panzers be protected for future operations,



The British and French left behind plenty of equipment on the Dunkirk beaches, but crucially rescued the vast majority of soldiers

and that with such overwhelming odds in their favour, Hitler was happy to accede to Göring's wish that the Luftwaffe finished the job. Perhaps Hitler was also haunted by memories of the attrition he witnessed in Flanders during World War I and wanted to avoid being sucked into a similar situation.

Whatever his reasons for agreeing to the halt order, in doing so Hitler let his opponents off the hook and gave them a propaganda coup. The British Army, though damaged, still remained in the fight. Four years later, it would return to northern France on D-Day, and this time it wouldn't be on the run.

THE OCCUPATION OF BRITAIN

Had the halt order not been issued, and if the BEF was destroyed at Dunkirk, it is possible that the Battle of Britain would have ended with a Nazi invasion force successfully crossing the English Channel. But what would have followed British surrender?

According to Nazi planning in Operation Sea Lion, Britain and Ireland would have been split into six command zones centring on London, Birmingham, Newcastle, Liverpool, Glasgow and Dublin. In a calculated snub, Churchill's ancestral home of Blenheim Palace was chosen as the overall headquarters of the German occupiers. It's possible that the northern zones would have been transferred to a Vichy-style puppet regime – Oswald Mosley was thought to be the most suitable figurehead – while the southern occupied zones may have been under the command of the Reich's Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop. Perhaps Edward VIII, who was known to be sympathetic to the Nazis prior to 1939, would have been persuaded to resume his place on the throne.

Sinister SS task forces would likely have crossed the Channel shortly after the invasion force. The Nazis had prepared a Black Book of 2,820 people who would face immediate arrest and probable execution, ranging from leaders like Winston Churchill to writers like HG Wells. Britain's 300,000 Jews would face a similar fate. The German Army's commander-in-chief, Walther von Brauchitsch, suggested all British men between the ages of 17 and 45 be removed to the continent and used as slave labour. Heinrich Himmler went even further. He suggested that the best way to subjugate Britain and France was to kill 80 per cent of their populations.



Above: SS officer Franz Six, who would have led the SS in Britain, toyed with the idea of shipping Nelson's Column to Berlin



Above: Hundreds of thousands of soldiers were vulnerable at Dunkirk, but Hitler missed the opportunity to capture them

“PERHAPS HITLER WAS ALSO HAUNTED BY MEMORIES OF THE ATTRITION HE HAD WITNESSED IN FLANDERS DURING WORLD WAR I”

DAILY MIRROR, Wednesday, June 5, 1940.

Daily Mirror

 No. 11,385 + + ONE PENNY
 Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper.

JUNE 5

DUNKIRK —LAST MEN GO

THE French Admiralty announced yesterday that the last land and naval forces defending Dunkirk were embarked during the night.

The port had previously been made useless to the Germans. The French Navy, it was added, had lost in the Dunkirk operations seven destroyers—Jaguar, Chacal, Adroit, Bourrasque, Foudroyante, Ouragan and Sirocco—and the supply ship Niger.

Confirming the completion of the evacuation, a British communiqué said: "Our losses, though considerable, are small in comparison to those which a few days ago seemed inevitable."

The French communiqué states: "Three hundred French warships and merchant vessels of various sizes, with 200 smaller boats, as well as numerous formations of the Naval Air Arm, took part in this operation. Most of the crews of our lost naval vessels were saved."

3 Admirals Land

"Other ships were damaged, but some have already put to sea again."

In addition to making Dunkirk unusable as a port, the Allied forces destroyed war material which could not be removed.

"When the Germans enter they will find almost nothing," French reports stated.

Three admirals of the French Navy and three French generals arrived at a south-east coast port yesterday with French troops evacuated from Dunkirk. They travelled to London to visit the Admiralty and War Office.

254 KILLED IN PARIS AIR RAID

Death-roll in Monday's Paris air raid was 254, of whom 195 were civilians and fifty-nine soldiers, says the Paris War Ministry. It adds: 652 were wounded—345 civilians, 107 soldiers.

MILITARY objectives in Munich, Frankfurt-on-Main and the Ruhr were bombed by Allied warplanes as a reprisal for Monday's raid on Paris, the official Havas Agency announced last night.

It has now been established that twenty-five of the German bombers taking part in yesterday's raid were brought down.

A Berlin report yesterday stated that a "suburb of Munich" was bombed by an Allied plane, and eight people were killed. One bomb, it was stated, hit a factory, causing much damage.

R.A.F. fighters maintained offensive patrols throughout Monday and early yesterday in the Dunkirk area.

In Germany refineries, oil tanks, supply depots and marshalling yards in the Ruhr Valley, Rhenish Prussia and in the neighbourhood of Frankfurt were among the important military objectives attacked.

WE NEVER SURRENDER

"EVEN if large tracts of Europe fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We will go on to the end, and will fight in France, on the oceans and in the air. We will defend our island, whatever the cost, and will fight on the beaches and landing grounds, in the fields and streets and we shall never surrender."

"Even if this island or a large part of it were subjugated, our Empire abroad, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle until, in God's good time, the new world, with all its force and men, set forth to the liberation and rescue of the old world."

That proclamation of the unbreakable Allied will to fight on for freedom was made by Mr. Winston Churchill in his speech to the House of Commons yesterday—the greatest speech ever made by a Prime Minister of Britain.

Standing as the staunch embodiment of that will to fight, he declared:—

"I have myself full confidence that if all do their duty, and if nothing is neglected, and the best arrangements made—as they are being made—we shall prove ourselves once again able to defend our island home."

"We shall ride out the storms of war and outlive the menace of tyranny, if necessary for years."

A roar of cheers answered his superb, stark confidence.

"That is the resolve of the Government—every man of it—and that is the will of Parliament, and the nation," said Mr. Churchill.

"The British Empire and the French Republic, linked together in their cause and in their need, will defend to the death their native soil, aiding each other like good comrades to the utmost of their strength."

THESE were other vital points in the Prime Minister's speech (the full report of which begins on page 3):

Thankfulness at the escape of the B.E.F. must not blind us to the fact that what happened in North France and Belgium was a colossal military disaster.

We must expect another blow almost immediately.

We have more military forces in this country now than ever before. This will not continue. We shall not be content with a defensive war. We shall build up the B.E.F. once again under its gallant Commander-in-Chief, Lord Gort.

Meantime we must bring Britain's defences to the height of efficiency.

IRONSIDES FOR HOME DEFENCE

SMALL bodies of highly mobile and strongly-armed troops—to be called "Ironsides"—are being organised for home defence by General Sir Edmund Ironside, Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces.

There will be many hundreds of these formed from the Regular Army. The War Office, announcing this last night, says that Sir Edmund has sent to each "Ironsides" a copy of the following saying by Oliver Cromwell:—

"Your danger is as you have seen: and truly I am sorry it is so great. But I wish it to cause no despondency, as truly I think it will not: for we are British. . . It's no longer disputing, but out instantly all you can."

The name Ironside, first given to Cromwell himself by Prince Rupert after the battle of Marston Moor in 1644, was later given to the troopers of his cavalry—those "God-fearing men," raised and trained by him in an iron discipline.

It traditionally implies great bravery, strength or endurance.

400,000 Local

Defence Volunteers

Lord Croft, Under-Secretary for War, stated in the House of Lords last night that 400,000 had volunteered for the L.D.V.

He protested against suggestions that officers who had come forward were too old.

"It is no mere outlet of patriotic emotion that we are endeavouring to recruit," he said, "but a fighting force which may be at grips with the enemy next week or even tomorrow."

Lord Strabolgi said that besides making open spaces unusable for the landing of invading planes we should do the same with large spaces of water.

Lord Breadalbane suggested that each local area should have a lorry armoured against splinters and bullets and armed with a couple of guns.

RUMOUR-MONGER TO BE CHARGED

A CHARGE of being responsible for a rumour that he had heard from a German broadcast by Lord Haw-Haw that the Nazis were going to attack a Mansfield school is being brought today against a man at Mansfield.

This was stated today by Mr. J. L. Nicol, Regional Information Officer, at the inaugural meeting at Nottingham of the North Midland Regional Advisory Committee, which will function under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Information.

Mr. Nicol added: "A Ministry official will attend."

This will be the first case of its kind under the new regulations.

LIVESTOCK LEAVES COAST

As a precautionary measure, the numbers of livestock in certain areas in South-East England are being reduced, says the Ministry of Agriculture. Some store animals, particularly ewes and lambs, are being transferred to other counties.

Stock fit for immediate slaughter is being bought by the Ministry of Food. The dispersal is not in any way extensive, and will not have any effect upon supplies of home-killed meat in those areas.

The Noble Story of Calais

Given an hour to surrender, 4,000 British and French troops, ordered to hold Calais to the end, spurned the demand to give in and kept the German hordes at bay for four days.

Then silence fell on the port. Thirty unwounded survivors were taken off by the Navy. This noble story of the heroic defence of Calais is told on page 3.

Pictures of the Evacuation: Pages 8 & 9

FRY'S retain pre-war prices

LORD WOOLTON'S APPEAL FOR SOLDIERS' WIVES

Lord Woolton, Minister of Food has appealed to manufacturers to produce goods 'within the reach of the wives of serving soldiers.'

Fry's Cocoa is still at the pre-war price—6d. per quarter pound—and the quality is unchanged.

There is no more economic food-drink than Fry's Cocoa.

The price and quality of Fry's Four-in-one and Fry's Chocolate Spread also remains unchanged.

FRY'S COCOA 6d. per $\frac{1}{4}$ lb.

FRY'S FOUR-IN-ONE 6d. per $\frac{1}{4}$ lb.

FRY'S CHOCOLATE SPREAD 6d. per carton

Prepared by J. S. FRY & SONS LTD., SOMERDALE, BRISTOL.

D243: 4649

Above: The safe arrival of British soldiers and their allies gave Britain a chance to salvage a propaganda victory from the jaws of defeat

DECLARATION OF WAR ON THE USA

HITLER INVITES THE MILITARY MIGHT OF THE USA TO INTERVENE IN EUROPE WITH AN EARLY CHALLENGE TO ROOSEVELT

On 7 December 1941, the Japanese Navy launched an audacious pre-emptive strike against the US naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Over the course of 90 minutes six ships were sunk, 13 others were damaged and 2,403 American lives were lost. Not until the day after the attack did Japan officially declare war on the United States.

Hitler had no prior knowledge of the raid on Pearl Harbor and would have preferred the Japanese to launch their offensive elsewhere. The German high command was keen that Japan attack the British in Singapore or the eastern USSR. However, Hitler should not have been surprised that the Japanese instead turned their guns on the USA. Only a few days earlier, the Japanese ambassador in Berlin had informed the Nazis that war was imminent between Japan and the USA and asked for a German commitment to declare war if conflict did break out across the Pacific.

Under the terms of the Tripartite Pact, Germany and Italy only needed to declare war if another country attacked Japan, not if Japan was an aggressor. Nevertheless, against

Ribbentrop's advice, Hitler announced to the Reichstag on 11 December that Germany had declared war on the USA. Although Washington DC had taken a neutral stance during the first two years of the war, President Roosevelt had pushed the boundaries of that neutrality and made little secret of his desire that Britain defeat the Nazi state, so Hitler was keen to take on the New World.

However, there was actually no real need for Hitler to declare war. While Germany was engaged in a two-front war in Europe against Britain and the USSR, the USA was effectively untouchable. All Hitler achieved was a symbolic gesture of support to his Japanese allies and a propaganda boost which drew attention away from the German Army's stagnation in the USSR. But in Washington DC, the German declaration of war inevitably led to a reciprocal American declaration of war against Germany. Roosevelt was able to present Hitler as the aggressor and won support for military action in Europe as well as against Japan – support that would not otherwise have been guaranteed in the isolationist USA.



Hitler announced the declaration of war to the Reichstag some 100 hours after Pearl Harbor



Above: Hitler applauded the audacious attack on Pearl Harbor but would have preferred a strike against Singapore or the USSR

Germany would likely have ended up in a fight against the USA at some point, but by declaring war immediately after Pearl Harbor, Hitler effectively invited the USA to the European theatre much earlier – an involvement that may have tipped the balance in the Allies' favour.

OVER SEXED, OVER PAID AND OVER HERE



STRATEGIC BOMBING

The US Air Force arrived in Britain in mid-1942 and, over the next three years, dropped over a million tons of bombs on Germany and occupied territory. Unlike the RAF under Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, the US shied away from indiscriminate civilian bombing in favour of targeted bombing of industrial and military complexes.



INVASION OF SICILY

Keen to get American boots on the continent, the US Seventh Army under General George Patton formed one of two landing parties during the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943. Benito Mussolini was toppled after a couple of weeks and Italian and German resistance crumbled, a successful start to the Italian Campaign.



D-DAY

Just less than half of the 156,000 Allied soldiers who landed on the Normandy beaches on D-Day were American. Given that one of the beaches assaulted by US troops was Omaha, which saw the heaviest fighting, American deaths were disproportionately high – 2,500 out of an Allied total of 4,500.



BATTLE OF THE BULGE

Germany's last real throw of the dice in Western Europe, the Battle of the Bulge, was a December 1944 counterattack in the Ardennes Forest to break through Allied lines. The US First Army took the brunt of the assault and eventually drove the Germans back, but not before sustaining nearly 90,000 casualties.

OPERATION BARBAROSSA

THE INVASION OF THE USSR LEADS TO CARNAGE ON THE EASTERN FRONT AND A TURNING POINT IN THE REICH'S FATE

At 3.15am on 22 June 1941, German artillery opened up and began a huge barrage aimed at Soviet fortification positions in Poland. Overhead, Luftwaffe heavy bombers droned towards cities in the USSR, dropping their loads on targets as far afield as Kronstadt and Sevastopol. Operation Barbarossa – the Nazi invasion of the USSR – had begun.

Nazi Germany and the communist USSR were natural enemies. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler declared that Eastern Europe was populated by sub-human non-Aryan Slavs and Jews, and that the land should be colonised by ethnic Germans. Stalin, by contrast, had long railed against the growth of fascism in Europe and had called for the Nazis to be overthrown. So it came as a surprise when, in August 1939, the foreign ministers of both states signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. It was a non-aggression treaty with a secret protocol which carved Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence – Poland would be divided in two, the Baltic states and Finland were to be granted to the USSR. Both Hitler and Stalin knew that the pact was only putting off an inevitable conflict, but Hitler needed freedom to attack France and Stalin needed time to build up the Soviet armed forces which lagged behind those of her European rivals.

Within two years, Hitler decided that it was time to take on the USSR and ordered Operation Barbarossa to begin. His audacious plan was a two-pronged assault by mobile armoured units; one heading through the Baltic states to Leningrad and Moscow, the other south through Ukraine to Kiev and the Donets Basin. The ultimate goal was control of the USSR west of the A-A line, drawn north-south from Arkhangelsk to Astrakhan.

It was a plan that, in the early days, looked like it was going to work. Stalin dithered, unsure how to respond to the double-cross by his ally, and within one week of the invasion beginning the Soviet Army had suffered 150,000 casualties. Kiev fell to the Germans on 26 September, with the loss of another 700,000 soldiers. Then the Nazis set their sights on Moscow.

The situation looked hopeless and Stalin considered fleeing the capital, but chose to stay, and the fight turned in the Soviets' favour. Momentum drained from the German advance as supply lines lengthened and the Soviets began a scorched-earth retreat. The onset of winter brought rain, making a blitzkrieg war of rapid movement impossible. Although German officers claimed that they were close enough to see the spires of the Kremlin, they were not close enough to actually take the city and a series of Soviet counteroffensives steadily pushed the German Army back. The Nazis had conquered much of western USSR over the

course of four months, but over the next four years they were slowly and steadily forced back to Berlin, never again regaining the initiative on the Eastern Front.

Hitler's overconfidence cost him. After the German blitzkrieg rampaged through Poland, subdued Denmark in a matter of hours and conquered France in 45 days, he had begun to believe that the Nazi war machine was unstoppable. He allowed twice the amount of time to bring the USSR to heel – a three month period – but insisted that the invasion would be over by the time bad weather set in, so the German Army would not need winter uniforms. Even when the invasion was delayed – it was originally scheduled for 15 May but did not get under way until 22 June due to the overrunning Balkan Campaign – Hitler refused to consider contingency plans in case the Wehrmacht found itself in the frozen north. When they did, it was too late to rescue them.

Yet Hitler's response to his blunder was to bury his head in the sand and blame those around him. Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch was relieved from his position as commander in chief of the German Army, to be replaced by the Führer himself. Hitler insisted on further offensives on the Eastern Front over the next two years, but the Führer was blind to the problems that the Nazis faced in the Soviet Union. The longer the Wehrmacht remained in enemy territory, the stronger the USSR became as it brought its vast industrial capacity online, and Stalin was prepared to concede territory in the short term to avoid a set-piece battle.

Operation Barbarossa was the moment when Hitler's hubris cost him the Reich. His decision to invade the USSR with an unrealistic timetable was a choice which went on to cost 4.3 million German lives.

THE SOVIET HOLOCAUST

The genocide of Europe's Jews during the Holocaust is rightly infamous, but less well known is the mass killing of Soviet citizens and prisoners of war. The murders began as soon as prisoners were taken.

Under the Commissar Order, any political commissar could be summarily executed, and its vague definition included not just political officers but any soldier who was considered 'thoroughly bolshevised'. Those who escaped at first were deliberately mistreated in death marches from the front lines and, if they still survived, under inhumane conditions in prisoner-of-war camps. Estimates suggest that 57 per cent of all Soviet POWs in German captivity died, with a mortality rate of one per cent every day during Operation Barbarossa. In contrast, only 3.6 per cent of British and American prisoners of war died while in German hands. Nor was it just prisoners of war who were targeted. SS killing squads hunted Jews and communists, while the German Army routinely burned houses and poisoned wells in an attempt to eradicate entire villages.

Hitler was well aware that the actions were illegal. Although the USSR had not signed up to the Geneva Conventions on ideological grounds because they allowed for the segregation of prisoners based on race, Germany was a signatory and should have treated prisoners of war accordingly. However, Hitler's aim was to ethnically cleanse the western USSR to provide living space for ethnic Germans, and his inhumane orders may have led to the deaths of over 20 million Soviet soldiers and civilians between 1941 and 1945.



Above: Nazi prison camps on the Eastern Front – here inspected by Heinrich Himmler – ignored rules laid down by the Geneva Conventions



The German Army found itself woefully underequipped for the Soviet winter, leading to over 4 million deaths

WHAT IF... HITLER HAD TAKEN MOSCOW IN 1941?

What would have happened if Adolf Hitler's plan to invade the Soviet Union in 1941 had succeeded, and the Soviet Union had collapsed?

What if Hitler had taken Moscow as part of Operation Barbarossa?

Hitler, of course, had hoped to knock out the whole of the USSR in a campaign of six to ten weeks. Now, in retrospect, that was ridiculously overambitious. The intelligence was wrong about the number of Soviet reserves and so on. However, if by some miracle they had been able to knock out the USSR, then you're left in a situation very similar to that which occurred in 1917-18 in WWI, where Germany managed to win on the Eastern Front. The Bolshevik Revolution started, the Bolsheviks made peace with Imperial Germany and the Germans were able to concentrate on the Western Front. So you have that sort of situation and it really throws the future course of the war into doubt.

So what would Germany have needed to do in order to successfully invade the Soviet Union at the time?

There's a big debate about whether a victory was ever actually within Hitler's grasp. The debate is centred around the role of Moscow. There are those such as RHS Stolfi who have said that Operation Barbarossa was the turning point of the war, and that Germany would have been able to destroy the Soviet Union had they gone straight for Moscow in August 1941 (rather than diverting and focusing on taking the Ukraine and besieging Leningrad, and only later going against Moscow – by which point the weather was turning against them). Effectively, the question becomes 'What is enough to make the Soviet regime fall apart?' That was what Germany achieved in 1917-18 – there were successive changes of regime, and the Bolsheviks were willing to make peace. However, what we know of the resilience of the Soviet regime in 1941-42 suggests that even the fall of Moscow might not have been enough for that to occur. In 1917, the Germans

had not even come close to Moscow, they had only taken Kiev and Riga – and that alone was enough to knock out Tsarist Russia. The later Soviet regime seemed a lot more ruthless and inspired a lot more devotion among the population. And, of course, German atrocities had been such that even those who might have welcomed a change of overlord realised the Nazis were even worse than Stalin had been.

My own perspective is that I don't think Germany could easily have taken Moscow at any time in 1941. Had they taken it, they might have lost it immediately during a Soviet winter counteroffensive, in very much the same way they lost Stalingrad in 1942-43. And, just as happened to Napoleon, just taking Moscow doesn't necessarily bring Russia to collapse. That was Napoleon's nemesis. So, frankly, I find it very difficult to envisage how the Soviet regime could have been beaten in 1941. Conceivably, there was a possibility of an attritional defeat of the USSR in 1942, but the tide of resources was turning against Germany then. So I find it difficult to see how Germany would have been able practically to achieve this knockout victory, given Soviet reserves, given Soviet commitment and given the sheer size of the country.

How would the Allies have reacted if Russia had fallen to the Axis?

A lot depends on at what stage this occurred and what else was happening around the world. Remember, what happened simultaneously with the decisive battle for Moscow was that the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the Americans were brought fully into the war. They had been helping the British significantly, but they weren't fully in the war until this surprise attack. And then Germany, of course, declared war on the United States. Had that happened, even if the Soviet Union had fallen at the same

PROFESSOR MARC MILNER

Marc Milner is professor of history and director of the Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society at the University of New Brunswick, Canada. He has published extensively on the Battle of the Atlantic and the history of the Royal Canadian Navy. A contributor to the official histories of both the RCN and the RCAF in World War II, Milner's book *Battle Of The Atlantic* won the CP Stacey Prize for the best book on military history in Canada in 2004. His recent work has been on the Normandy campaign, including *Stopping The Panzers: The Untold Story Of D-Day*, which won the US Commission on Military History's James Collins Book Prize for 2014-15.





What if the Soviet Union had fallen following the German invasion in 1941?

time, then you would have this ongoing war with Britain and America.

Imagine a nightmare scenario where war did not start between Germany and the United States after all. One way to avoid that would be for Japan not to attack Pearl Harbor, but instead to attack Siberia and gang up on the Soviet Union while it was on the ropes. And that might have helped with the collapse of the Soviet Union, because it was forces released from Siberia (when the Soviets realised Japan was not going to attack the USSR) that helped support the defence of Moscow.

For the British, all hope of victory would have effectively been lost, because the Americans would not be in the war at all. Therefore, Germany could have perhaps presented Britain with a *fait accompli*, where its greatest continental ally had been defeated. Remember that was one reason why Napoleon attacked Russia, to remove Britain's last ally so the British had no further option to continue the war. And then you might have got some sort of stalemate situation.

So you can see a scenario where Hitler dominated the continent, but still would have had a considerable challenge in defeating Britain. However, with such German dominance of the continent, the war would have probably ground to a halt in effect. Britain would certainly have suffered great continuing losses, just as it did in reality with the loss of Tobruk in 1942, the U-Boat war, the Luftwaffe bombings, and so on. So in that scenario you can see Britain being cowed into some sort of bitter, albeit perhaps temporary, peace.

Would the success of Operation Barbarossa have lasted with the United States fully committed to the war?

Let's say the Soviet Union collapsed after Pearl Harbor, despite the Japanese having turned against America and brought the United States fully into the war. That's much more akin to the situation in 1918 where the Germans won the war in the East, and brought forces back to the West to hold and possibly win. They failed in 1918 as US reinforcements poured in, but what might have happened in 1942-43 is a very interesting question, militarily. Assuming

you don't get the compromise peace, would the Allies be able to win regardless?

There's a big debate in the literature about this. There are those such as Norman Davies – perhaps the chief exponent of this view – who say the whole war was dominated by the war in the East, that the war on the Western Front was a sideshow compared to its enormous scale and by implication the Soviets won the war rather than the Allies. At the opposite extreme there's Phillips O'Brien, who says that the West could have defeated the Nazi war machine even if the Soviet Union had collapsed. So there's



Hitler's troops marched for weeks, covering a huge distance and ultimately stretching supply lines too thinly

COMPARING REAL AND ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO TIMELINES

REAL TIMELINE

- **SIGNING OF THE MOLOTOV-RIBBENTROP PACT**
AUGUST 1939
Known as the Nazi-Soviet Pact or the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact, the agreement saw the Soviets and the Nazis agree to a fragile form of peace, although it didn't last for very long.

ALTERNATE TIMELINE

● TURNING POINT

HITLER LAUNCHES OPERATION BARBAROSSA

22 JUNE 1941

Despite the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Hitler becomes fixated on the idea of destroying the Soviet Union. He believes it weak enough to break with the blitzkrieg tactics that also took France, Norway and many more. Spies loyal to the Soviet regime (including Richard Sorge, based in Japan) send word to Moscow that Hitler is planning to betray them, but Stalin refuses to believe them. Even when Axis forces cross the threshold into Soviet territory, Stalin initially orders artillery not to fire as he believes the invasion may have been greenlit without Hitler's permission.

● THE NAZI ENCIRCLEMENT IS COMPLETE

19 JULY 1941

Soviet forces are now effectively surrounded by the Germans. Hitler orders his commanders to obliterate the Soviets rather than push on with all haste to Moscow.

● THE LUFTWAFFE CRUSH THE SOVIET AIR FLEET

25 JUNE 1941

By the end of the first three days of the invasion, it's estimated over 3,000 Soviet aircraft have been shot down as the German war machine advances. Reports suggest only 78 German planes were lost.

● SMOLENSK FALLS TO THE NAZIS

16 JULY 1941

The large city of Smolensk, one of the key strategic locations on the road to Moscow, falls as Hitler's three pincer movement crushes any Soviet resistance.

● SMOLENSK AND KIEV FALL

AUGUST 1941

Kiev and Smolensk fall faster due to an accelerated campaign of air bombardment and advancing armour. The cities are levelled and all counterattacks defended, mainly due to Hitler's desire to move on Moscow.

● THE LUFTWAFFE PUMMELS THE SOVIET GROUND FORCES

JUNE-JULY 1941

Along with effectively disabling the Soviet air force, the Luftwaffe provide a two-pronged attack in the centre and the south, with a sustained campaign of aerial bombardment.

● LARGE SCALE ATROCITIES ARE AVOIDED

JULY 1941

Hitler is convinced by his generals that a campaign of cleansing against Bolshevik Jews will turn the Russian people against them. However, a plan to purge the Bolshevik Jews remains until after Moscow falls.

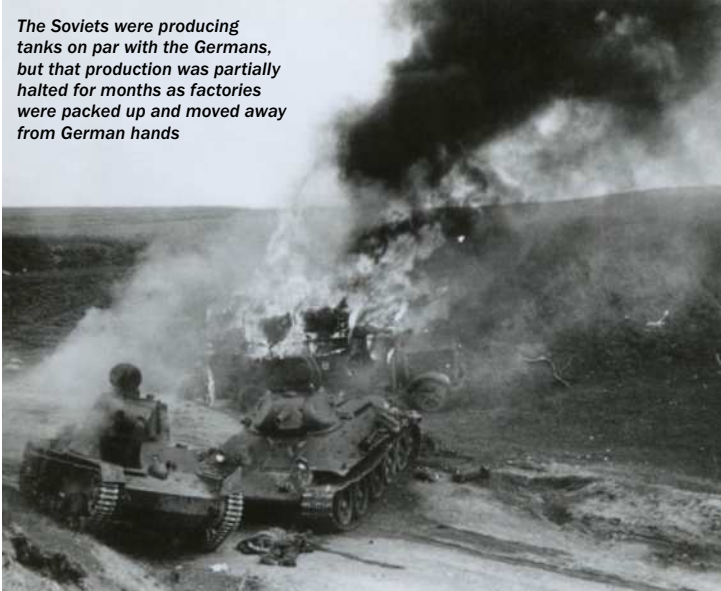
a significant scholarly debate on this. My own opinion falls somewhere in the middle. The release of a proportion of those forces on the Eastern Front would have allowed Germany to garrison continental Europe so heavily as to make it very difficult for the Allies to launch successful amphibious invasions. The fact that there was no continuing land front as in France in 1918 would have been a big obstacle for the Allies, given the enormous challenge of mounting operations like D-Day. So I think one could perhaps have reached a stalemate in land terms, with the combatants divided by

the Channel and the Mediterranean. What wouldn't have been a stalemate would have been the air war. The main plank to Phillips O'Brien's argument is that WWII was primarily an air war, and by 1942-43 the Allies were starting to gain air superiority over the Axis and bomb Germany.

So what you've got is a nightmarish situation for all concerned, where it would have taken years and years for the Allies to eventually wage a ground war against Nazi Germany, but they would have continued to fight the air war; so you would have German cities being

incinerated despite the fact that, in theory, the Nazis controlled the continent. And, as we know, in 1945 the US got the atomic bomb, which would have been pursued with even greater urgency in the scenario here. So you could argue that, in 1945, the Germans would lose anyway because they would get the same treatment the Japanese received at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And given that Germany would have been in a far better territorial and resource position than Japan, it would have taken a significantly larger number of bombs to defeat Hitler's regime.

The Soviets were producing tanks on par with the Germans, but that production was partially halted for months as factories were packed up and moved away from German hands



Hitler was determined to use his tactics of shock and awe on the Soviets, and such a course of action worked for the first few weeks



● SIEGE OF LENINGRAD BEGINS

8 SEPTEMBER 1941
While Germany would ultimately never fully take the city of Leningrad, it would effectively lock it down into a brutal blockade that lasts until 1943.

● HITLER ORDERS OPERATION TYPHOON

26 SEPTEMBER 1941
With weather conditions ideal, and the Russian winter holding off, Hitler officially orders the Axis forces to attack Moscow and take the city with shock and awe.

● THE SIEGE GRINDS TO A HALT

5 DECEMBER 1941
Rain, snow and a supply line that's stretched too thin sees the Axis attack on Moscow stall. Hitler reluctantly orders his forces to temporarily withdraw from besieging the city.

● THE SOVIET COUNTEROFFENSIVE BEGINS

6 DECEMBER 1941
With the Germans struggling to deal with the worsening weather conditions, and its exposed supply lines, the Soviets began a brutal counteroffensive to drive the Axis back.

● RUSSIAN RESOURCES COME INTO PLAY

AUGUST 1941
As the Axis pushes further into Central Russia, Hitler orders that all disenfranchised Soviet soldiers be offered the chance to enlist. Soviet armour is also repurposed to bolster German forces.

● SOVIETS DESTROY THE OIL FIELDS

SEPTEMBER 1941
Hitler is keen to gain control of the oil fields in the Caucasus. While the Nazis occupy those on the outlying reaches, Stalin orders the destruction of those that remain in Soviet power.

● SOVIET ARMIES ARE CRIPPLED

18 SEPTEMBER 1941
Three months into the invasion, two thirds of the Soviet forces have now been obliterated by the Axis. Soviet commands begins to pull forces back to reinforce Moscow.

● MOSCOW BEGINS TO FALL

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1941
With bolstered supply lines, a larger army and a diminished response from the Soviet partisans, Stalin tries to oversee the defence of the city. By now the Germans are enforcing an encirclement of Moscow, forcing its leaders to flee.

● CONTINENTAL EUROPE UNDER NAZI CONTROL

NOVEMBER 1941- JANUARY 1942
With the collapse of the Soviet Union, every other state is forced to surrender or is obliterated by Nazi forces on all sides. Britain now remains isolated as the Nazi menace grows ever stronger.

● LENINGRAD SIEGE BEGINS

LATE AUGUST 1941
Hitler's generals advised him that Leningrad should be forced into a blockade, but that the bulk of the German forces and new Soviet defectors should push directly onto Moscow before the winter.

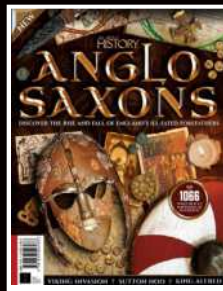
● SIEGE ON MOSCOW BEGINS FAR EARLIER

LATE SEPTEMBER 1941
Stalin's purges and campaign of fear has created a disconnect with some of his people. Hitler uses this fact to take many airfields and factories on his way to Moscow. This bolsters his supply lines.

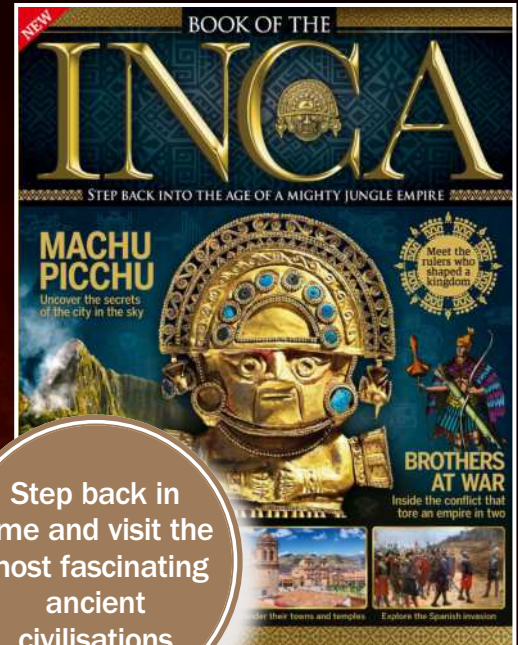
● MOSCOW SURRENDERS TO THE AXIS

OCTOBER 1941
Despite a quick counteroffensive, the city ultimately surrenders to the Nazi war machine. Resistance is still heavy, and German losses have been considerable, but the USSR is beginning to crumble.

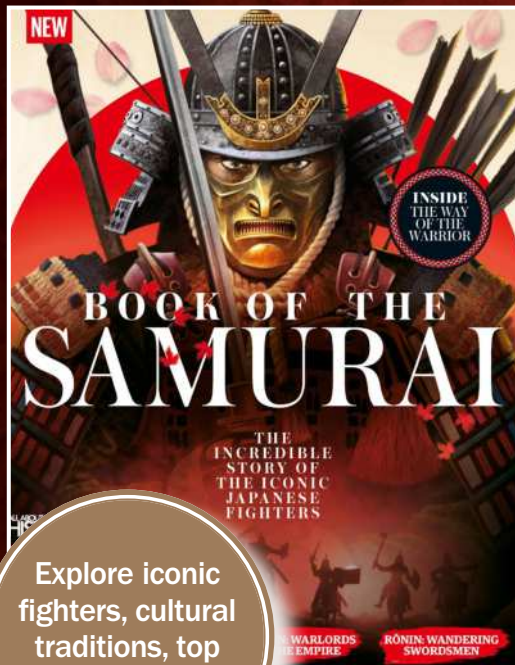
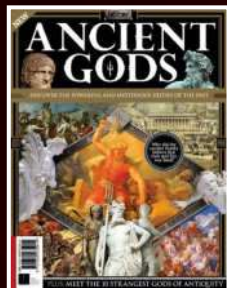
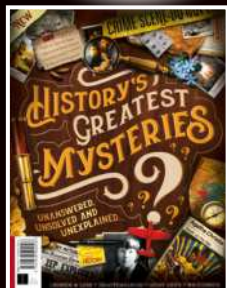




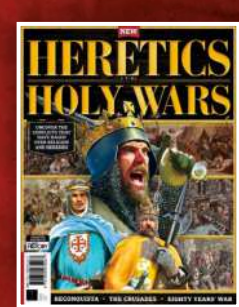
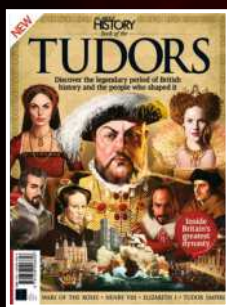
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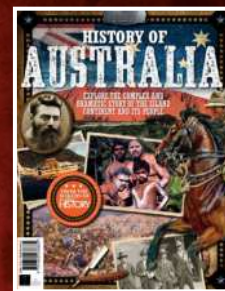
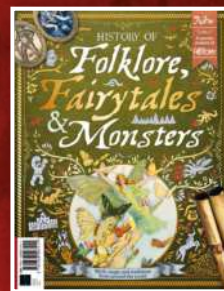
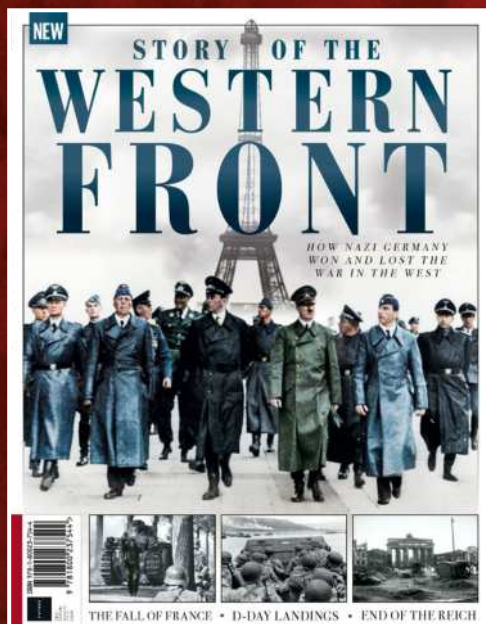
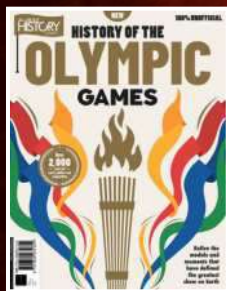
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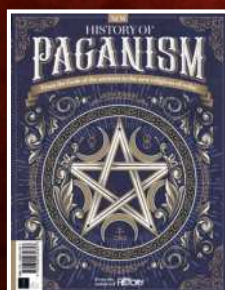
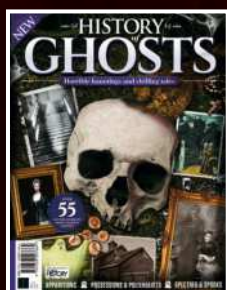


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